

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



OCTOBER 1983

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DEATH STALKS THE CAMPUS

by Brett Halliday

Hers was a voice out of the past, calling for help. That was reason enough for Mike Shayne to answer — but there was another reason he couldn't quite explain, not even to himself at first. He simply knew he had to do what he had to do, no matter the danger it involved. 4

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She felt something grab her hair. She jerked to a stop, felt herself being pulled back into the darkness. In the pale moonlight she saw a glint of cold steel — a knife descending toward her. . . .

Death Stalks The Campus

by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE PALE OCTOBER MOON PERCHED ON A LOW BANK OF clouds like a jack-o'-lantern on a gray porch. The two young women strolled out of the glow of the well-lighted classroom building, their arms filled with books and their heads with ideas. The farther they got from the building, the darker the paths that crisscrossed the flat campus. Short goodbyes and jack-rabbit starts filled the quickly emptying commuter lots surrounding them.

"I can't believe you, Susie Q," said the short brunette in the designer running outfit.

"Why not?" answered the blonde.

"You stayed after class to ask Professor Darke a question and you really asked him a question — about literature. If that hunk came on to me that way, I know what I'd be asking him this time of night."

"Judy, you're terrible. Can't you think of anything but guys and booze, guys and parties, guys and . . . "

"There's always men, and that Professor Darke, well, I'll bet he doesn't eat quiche."

"No, but I bet he gobbles up young pussycats."

"Meow, meeow!"

The two coeds' laughter burst forth powerfully, but was lost in the quiet openness of the newly-deserted campus.

"I'm all for pizza and beer," said Judy when the laughter stopped. "Who knows? If we're lucky, we'll get that same delivery boy we had last time; he can deliver me his pepperoni any day."

The blonde shook her head, then abruptly turned pensive. "Judy, one day you'll realize that there's more to a relationship than a quick hop into bed."

"I know," she said coyly. "Some hops are longer than others. I was just reading this magazine that showed over fifty different ways to 'please your man,' as they put it."

"Come on," said the blonde, irritation tinging her tone. "I'm serious. Why did you come to college anyway?"

"For 528 reasons, and they all button their shirts to the left. Lighten up, Susie Q. You take everything too seriously."

"Maybe it's just because of what I had to go through to get here."

Judy stopped. She reached out and touched her friend's hand. "I told you, roomie — anytime you finally want to talk about that mysterious past of yours, I'd be there to listen."

"Didn't you love tonight's class?" said Susan.

"Don't switch subjects on me," said her friend.

The blonde started walking again. "How did you fill out Professor Darke's questionnaire? What was your number one fear?"

"That was easy," said Judy. "Sleeping alone."

"There you go again."

"O.K.," said the brunette, "I'll play along. What's your number one fear — not making an *A* in Professor Darke's Gothic Lit class?"

The blonde was silent for a moment, then sharply said, "Men."

"Men. After what you've been telling me," said Judy. "You've got to be kidding?"

"No, I've never been more serious. In my entire life only one man has ever treated me like a human being. You know, with respect as though I were more than a piece of meat to devour for dinner."

Judy stopped her friend again. "Give, Susie Q. Who is this mysterious stranger from your past?"

"Just a guy."

"Tall, dark, and handsome, I'll bet."

"Tall, yeah; handsome, but with red hair."

"Rich?"

"Hardly. He lives out of a termite-laden hotel and a bottle of Martell," Susan said.

"Doesn't sound like my idea of Prince Charming."

"Charming he's not, but he's got other things."

"Like what?" Judy asked.

"Like a sense of morals, of what's right and wrong, of responsibility, of commitment . . ."

"You sound like a bad Barbara Cartland novel. I'll bet this guy also loves animals and helps little old ladies across the street."

"He probably does," said Susan in a soft, lilting voice.

"If you're so hung up on this guy, why haven't you ever mentioned him?" said Judy.

"We're from two different worlds."

"Ah, Barbara Cartland, *Forbidden Love*, Chapter Four." She laughed. "Get real, Susan. If you want the dude, go get him."

"Nobody gets to this guy. You just don't understand."

"One thing I do understand," said the brunette. "I'm starving, and the apartment is this way." She started down a blacktop path.

"I'll be there later," said the blonde. "That *Danse Macabre* book Professor Darke mentioned tonight sounds like just what I need for my term paper. I'm heading for the library."

"Bookworm," said Judy. "I'll save you some brew, but the pepperoni is all mine, if you know what I mean."

The blonde waved her arm. "Get out of here."

WHILE THE TWO WOMEN HAD BEEN TALKING, THE MOON had ducked behind the gray clouds. The blonde found herself alone in almost total darkness. The Miami night air felt unusually cool for this time of year. Around her, birds yelped loudly as if their nightly serenade had been disturbed.

The blonde started down the path that led past the palm-lined amphitheatre. She hadn't wanted to tell Judy even that much about herself. In her twenty-four years the tall, redhaired detective was the only thing she cared to remember about a past she tried daily to forget. And that one memory was private. A strong island in a sea of sludge. She had promised herself that she would never call him, never intrude upon his life. She owed him that. The memory was good, and that was enough she told herself in moments of weakness. Then there was that tiny fear that if she tried to build on that one beautiful piece

of the past, she would find that he was in reality no better than other men. She wasn't willing to take that chance.

Behind her, footsteps matched her own. When she slowed, they slowed. She sped up. They followed. She stopped and called out tentatively, "Come on, Judy. You've had your fun."

No answer.

The old fear, the one her roommate had so unexpectedly unwrapped this evening as if it were a gift, welled up inside her. She started to walk faster, then to run.

The footsteps followed.

Her fear was catching up to her quickly. Damned commuter college, she thought. A half-hour after class and it was like a ghost town. The library was just over the rise. She passed the amphitheatre. You crossed the bridge and then the lights. If she could just make it a little farther.

The heavy books she had grown attached to slowed her down. She thought of throwing them to the ground. A year ago she had been warier. She would never have gotten herself into this situation. It was all *his* fault, his idea that she go to school, his idea that she change her lifestyle and try to make something out of herself. Well, Mr. P.I., she thought, I got along just fine for years without school, without classes, without books, without you.

As her foot hit the wooden slats of the rustic bridge, she felt something grab her hair. She jerked to a stop. Then she was being pulled backwards. Another greasy john.

The scream was halfway out her mouth when a hard palm forced it back. She was pinned to the ground. No, not again. This was supposed to be behind her.

She struggled to free herself and caught a glimpse of a dark hood-covered head. The moon just creeping from behind a cloud glinted off cold steel.

Instinctively her hand, still clutching a textbook, flashed in front of her. The book knocked the blade to the ground. A hand hit her. Again, then again, and again. Her blouse tore loose in a loud rip.

Then she heard footsteps running toward her as the hands groped for her breasts. Were the footsteps a friend of hers or another attacker?

The blonde passed out before she found out.

II

EVER SINCE HO LU HAD TRIED TO BRAINWASH HIM INTO becoming a pawn, an assassin, Mike Shayne had been visited by a host

of strange dreams. He had told Tim Rourke about it, and the crack reporter for the Miami *Daily News* had put in his entry for Amateur Psychologist of the Year. "Simple. The bastard's given you a sense of vulnerability you never had." One dream the redhead hadn't mentioned to Rourke, but every night without fail the nightmare recurred.

He and Lucy were alone on an island. Although they were side by side every day, every night while they slept a fissure would develop. When he awoke, a jagged gap separated him from his long-time secretary and intimate friend. By day they would labor together to fill the gulf, but every morning it was there again — a bit wider.

The ringing tumbled down the dark shaft toward the big detective. His massive hand groped about before grabbing the receiver.

"Shayne, sorry to disturb you."

The telephone voice was that of the new night clerk. The rangy redhead had heard rumors he had left Boston for a warmer climate when a ladyfriend of a long affair had dumped him.

"Thought better of it," continued the voice, "and thought I'd better warn you."

"Of what?" said the detective, not fully awake.

A soft knock came from his front door.

"A visitor. You got one on the way."

"Thanks," said Shayne as he hung up. He was completely awake now. A Smith & Wesson had appeared at the end of his hand like a steel fifth finger as he crept to the door. Disengaging the deadbolt, he said, "Come in."

The door opened, and a blonde woman entered. Her face was black and blue, her nose was bent to the side like a wind-blasted weather-vane, and her pink blouse looked like someone had played Capture the Flag with it.

"Diamond," said Shayne.

"Typical weak woman, eh?" she said, trying to smile through lips of puffed purple. "No sooner do I promise myself not to ever bother you again, and here I am."

Shayne carried the heavily breathing woman into the bedroom and set her down softly on the hard mattress. "I'll call you a doctor."

"Call me anything you want, but don't get a physician." She smiled weakly. "Bad joke."

"No doctor?"

"No doctor, no police report," she said suddenly wincing.

"O.K., if you let me help you."

"The terms of surrender are acceptable."

Shayne emptied a tray of ice cubes into a towel and tied its ends together. He settled the makeshift cold-pack down on her face. He filled a bowl with hot water and placed it on the nightstand alongside some items from the medicine cabinet. Gently he wiped away the crusted blood, cleansing her few cuts with hydrogen peroxide.

"You've got a great bedside manner, doc," she said, trying hard not to register the obvious pain she was feeling.

"What happened?"

"Would you believe the varsity volleyball team got drunk and confused my head with their volleyball?"

"Were they playing on that swampland you're going to try to sell me next?" said Shayne.

She was putting up a good front, the redhead thought. He had been whacked around enough times to know how it felt, and either the lady had one hell of a high threshold of pain or good self-control. From what little he knew of her, he voted for the latter.

"I've got a few discreet doctor friends," he said.

She put a cold finger on his lips and shook her towel-covered face. "Where's Lucy?" she said after awhile.

Caught off-guard, Shayne said, "We don't have that kind of relationship."

"But," she coughed, "you do have a relationship?"

Shayne nodded.

"She wouldn't mind if you helped an old friend?"

"No."

"And you wouldn't mind?"

"No."

"Then, old friend, if you want to help, just hold on to me for awhile."

"Sure," said the redhead, sitting down beside her and placing her head in his lap. "Sure, for an old friend."

She closed her eyes. For the longest time Shayne stared down while moving the cold-pack around her face. When he finally looked up, dawn's early light had crept into the room unnoticed.

THE TEMPTING AROMA OF SAUSAGE AND EGGS GREETED THE blonde as she emerged from the steamy bathroom. She was wearing only one of Shayne's long-sleeve, white shirts; she hadn't bothered to use but one button. What the redhead most noticed, though, was how

much better she looked after sleep and a shower. The ice-packs had done their job. Her swelling had almost vanished, and Shayne could see the return of most of the innocent, child-like beauty she had possessed when they first met.

She sat down at the kitchen table and rolled up the sleeves. When he put the heaping plate of food in front of her, she looked down, almost forcibly keeping her eyes from swiveling toward her benefactor.

"Wow," she said, "this sure beats the powdered eggs and limp bacon at the school cafeteria, but I can't handle all this. After all, one must eat to live, not live to eat."

"Sounds pretty philosophic to me," said the redhead, pulling up a chair.

"*Gargantua et Pantagruel* actually," she said between bites of scrambled eggs. "We're reading it in my French class, in French." She blushed. "That's silly — what else would you read in French class?"

"Dirty novels," suggested Shayne lightheartedly. He sensed her nervousness. "Seriously, you sound as if you like school." It had been obvious all morning she didn't want to talk about what had happened to her last night.

"Just think of me as your typical coed. Sorority rush, new roommate, lost in the library. The whole nine yards."

"Got a crush on your English teacher yet?"

She paused in mid-bite. "Well, maybe eight yards."

Shayne remembered the last time he had actually seen her. She was scared then too. He had just rescued her from her sponsor, a high-class pimp named Blythe-Smith who was "disciplining" her. The redhead had taken her to her sister's for safety. They hadn't seen each other since, but they had kept in touch. He recalled the excitement in her voice when she had announced that she had taken one of his suggestions. She bubbled over the telephone as she talked about going back to college. New friends, new surroundings, a new life. Yeah, he could understand why after what she had been through it would be hard re-establishing relationships with men.

"Go on and ask," she said abruptly. "I know what you're thinking."

"What, Carnak?" he said, unable to figure out why she was so defensive.

"Old habits die hard."

"That's not it, Diamond."

The blonde threw down her fork. "The name is Susan, Susan

Hanson, and for your information, Mr. Prosecutor, I did not entice someone into the amphitheatre to attack me."

"I'm sorry, Susan. The name . . . "

"And I did not come running to you because I'm used to having a man protect me when a john gets a little rough."

"Now wait just a damned minute," said Shayne, his Irish temper rising to simmer.

She yanked off the over-sized shirt and threw it at him. "Thanks for the hospitality, big guy. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. Even though we spent the night together, I'm not going to charge you a red cent."

Her body, standing before him stark naked, began to shudder. Seconds after the first tear dropped out, she was bawling, "Oh, hell," she screamed and ran toward him. "Oh, Mike, hold me, hold me tight. I'm scared."

The redhead wrapped his massive arms around her. If he had anything to say about it, nobody was ever going to hurt her again.

SHAYNE KEPT THE BUICK'S NOSE POINTED WEST. ONE BLOCK past the Florida American campus, he turned right. The small, liberal-arts school had shown up in the background research he had done on the Lott case. One look at the compact campus had convinced him why the silent blonde beside him had chosen F.A.C. over Miami Dade or Suntan U. She could really get the feel of this campus — only last night she had gotten a little too much of it.

"Over there," she said, pointing to a stuccoed apartment complex.

"I still think you ought to stay at my place," said Shayne. "A guy like you ran into last night might not give up so easily."

"Mike, I'm on my own now. I appreciate your help, but I'll be O.K. Besides," she laughed, "I've already got a roommate."

As Shayne pulled over, she said, "Oh, damn. Not him, not him again after all this time."

The big detective looked at the doorway. Standing in it, his back half-turned to the street, was a tall, middle-aged man with a dark suit and graying hair. In his hand was a metallic briefcase.

She cringed down in the seat. "How did he ever find me?"

III

"WHO IS HE?" SHAYNE SAID.

She sank down farther into her seat. "Just somebody from my past I don't want to talk to."

"You wait here," he said.

The redhead got out of the Buick and walked up to the stoop. The man in the dark suit obviously hadn't seen Diamond.

"Can I help you, pal?" said Shayne, his tone between polite and a command.

"I seriously doubt it, my good man," said the figure, studying Shayne with obvious disdain, "but I am looking for a Miss Susan Hanson."

"Too bad, pal, because she's not looking for you." Shayne wondered if he were overdoing the heavy bit.

"I would like Miss Hanson to tell me that."

"She just did."

"Who are you?"

"Just a friend."

"Oh," he said, raising an eyebrow and glancing at where Shayne's burly arms tightly emerged from his blue polo shirt. "I thought she still had a higher class clientele. Perhaps you can take the whore out of the streets, but you can't take the streets out of the whore."

Shayne grabbed the man's lapels. "It's a good thing you and the Brooks Brothers are leaving, or your tailor'd be in for some extra business this week." He lifted the gray suit up and sat him down on the sidewalk.

"There's no need for physical force. I was just leaving." He handed Shayne a card. "When the young lady in question wants to talk, have her call me. Here's my number. Tell her there's more than money in this."

Shayne glanced down at the card. BRADLEY ROTH. Where had he heard the name before?

As the departing figure turned the corner, the apartment door opened, and a young woman with short-cropped brown hair appeared.

"Well, hello there," she said with a spider-to-the-fly look in her eyes. "The creepo's been standing there for half an hour. I told him Susie wasn't here, but he said he'd wait. Now you, if you want to wait, come on in."

Shayne smiled reflexively as the blonde stepped out of the Buick.

"Susie Q," said the brunette. "Wait a minute. Tall, handsome, redhaired. It's the P.C. in person."

Shayne looked at her strangely.

As the blonde drew closer, the brunette gasped and ran up to her. "Susan, what happened? Are you O.K.?"

"I'm fine — now," she said. "Let's just say I ran into the revolving

door at the library."

"And dropped your books, huh? Some taxi driver brought them by earlier this morning. When he left, I think his meter was still running. Seriously, you don't know how worried I've been. You didn't come in last night, a guy brings me your books he said he found by the amphitheatre, and then that creepo showed up at the front door." She hugged her.

"Thanks, Mike," said Susan.

Shayne nodded.

"Hello, Mike," said the brunette. "I'm Judy, the absentminded one's roommate. You want to come in for a cup of coffee or whatever?"

Shayne had had worse offers.

"Mike's got to go," said Susan with determination. "I've already taken up too much of his valuable time."

Shayne got her message. He had to go.

THE BIG DETECTIVE SPENT MOST OF THE ALL-TOO-TROPICAL day trying to run down some not-too-promising leads in the Sternwood missing daughter case. By the time he finally got to his Flagler St. office, both Miami and his secretary were steaming.

"Finally the Great Detective makes an appearance," said Lucy Hamilton as she stood and gave him a mock curtsy.

Shayne went straight to the water bottle. They both needed time to cool down. "Come on, Angel. It's been a long, hot day."

"I'll just bet it has." Her brown eyes cut a hole in the middle of his chest as cleanly as a .38 slug. "Of course it would have been shorter if you had gotten an earlier start and cooler if you had started alone."

"You called Spenser."

"Of course I called the night clerk when you didn't drop by or even send a message by noon."

"You want an explanation?"

She turned her back to him and ravaged an open file drawer. "You don't have to explain anything to me, Michael. Your private life is your own — isn't that what we've always said? You and I just work together."

"And pretty damned well, I'd say." Shayne crushed the paper cup and heaved it over the waste basket.

"Who's the blonde?" she said, trying to be casual.

"You remember the Rogue case, the berserk cop who went after some pimps?"

"Diamond," she said suddenly. "The call girl."

"The ex-call girl," he said, looking for the Martell.

"Well, not being content with being Miami's number-one private eye, you've moved into social work. 'Improve your education, my dear.' What's the matter? Did she need help on her chemistry homework? You are an expert in chemistry, aren't you, Michael?"

"Just in mixing certain things," Shayne said as he poured the Martell in a spotty water glass. "Come on, Lucy. This isn't like you. Didn't your informant tell you that she had been beat up pretty bad last night?"

Lucy Hamilton turned to face him. "Michael, I didn't know."

"She didn't want to go to a doctor because he'd have to report her injuries, and if the press picked up the story, goodbye new life."

"Is she all right?"

"As Tim would say, the filly's got a lot of heart, but who knows how she'll do down a long stretch." He poured himself some more cognac. "She's really determined to make it on her own."

"Is that why she came running to you?"

"Lucy, you're not being fair. She was hurt."

His beautiful secretary sat down in her squeaky chair Shayne had been promising to replace for years. He couldn't blame Lucy. If an old male friend of hers had spent the night with her, he might have — hell, *would* have — reacted the same way. Maybe the whole incident, the misunderstanding, they were not-too-subtle hints to re-examine their relationship, but now wasn't the time.

"The name Bradley Roth mean anything to you?" he tried, changing the subject.

As though the last twenty-four hours had never happened, Lucy assumed the role of the efficient, well-informed secretary. "Roth. City Council. A little to the right of John Birch. Wants to clean up the combat zone. Make our streets safe from drugs, pornography, hookers . . . I didn't mean . . . why did you ask about Roth?"

"I ran into him this morning at Susan's apartment."

"Susan," she exploded. "So Dr. Shayne also makes house calls. Aren't you afraid of overextending yourself, Superman?"

"Lucy, last night nothing . . ."

The telephone rang. Saved by the bell, the redhead thought.

His secretary ripped the receiver from the base. "Michael Shayne Investigations."

The honey in her voice had turned to vinegar.

"It's for you," she said, her voice quivering.

She didn't have to say who was on the line, he figured as he said, "Hello."

"Mike, Mike, you've got to come quickly."

"Easy, Susan."

"Judy's at some meeting, and there's somebody trying to get in."

IV

SHAYNE IGNORED TWO TRAFFIC LIGHTS AND A ONE-WAY street on his way to her apartment. He screeched the big Buick to a stop beside a dumpster and lept out, patting the small of his back to check on his .38. As he ran toward her apartment, he wished he had had time to talk things over with Lucy. The thought flashed through his mind that the whole problem was that he and Lucy never had any private time. The outside world waited for the most inopportune moments to intrude.

Just as he reached the stoop, Susan opened the door and grabbed his hand. "He's out back. I keep hearing him, but I don't dare look out."

"Stay here," Shayne yelled as he headed through the apartment to the back door.

The big detective threw it open. Standing beside a red-hot barbecue grill was a hefty man with no neck, who looked like he could play linebacker for the Dolphins.

"Nobody advertised for a short-order cook, pal," said the redhead.

"I thought Susan Hanson lived here," said the young hulk. "I just wanted to talk with her."

"Have you ever heard of the custom of knocking on the front door?"

"Nobody needs to teach me manners, least of all you, Pops."

Shayne was tired and irritated. He didn't need trouble. "Why," he said, "don't you humor an old man, then, and go home so I can drink my warm milk and take a nap."

The visitor struck a muscle-beach pose. "You Susan's dad, or is this her day to help senior citizens?"

Shayne was not amused.

The no-neck shoved the rangy redhead backwards. "Why don't you take a load off, Pops. You know stress is bad for the old ticker."

Shayne took the load, all 220 pounds of it, off his feet with a combination sharp right to the gut and a left uppercut. Even the redhead was shocked at the hardness of the kid's body.

"So it's recreation time, is it?" said the kid, bouncing up.

As if Shayne were a ball-carrier about to cross the goal line, the kid

lowered his head and charged the detective. Before Shayne could react, the hulk buried a shoulder in his stomach. The two sprawled into a lawn chair that collapsed instantly under their combined weight.

"Mike, stop. It's all a mistake," cried Susan. "That's Benny Hall. He's just a guy in my American History class who keeps hitting on me."

Her words came too late to stop a sledge-hammer right to the young historian's jaw. At least Shayne hoped that was what Susan would believe.

The big detective got to his feet. He grabbed the no-neck under his arms and lifted him to a wobbly-kneed standing position. "Junior and I were discussing proper recreational activities for the geriatric set. Isn't that right, kid?"

The kid shook his red-stained head. "Hey, Susan, if you didn't want to go out with me, why didn't you just say so?"

"I have, Benny, at least ten times."

"This time I think Benny boy got the message," said the detective. "If you get an urge to sneak in back doors, pal, next time try the library."

"Hey, Pops, it's not over between you and me," said the kid as he staggered toward the parking lot.

"I'm sorry, Mike," said Susan. "I guess I just overreacted."

"We all do, sometimes," said Shayne.

"Let me make it up to you?"

"How?"

SHAYNE LOOKED DOWN AT THE PAPER PLATE. THE WELL-grilled burger was indistinguishable from a lump of charcoal. The potato chips were as crisp as newly-cooked pancakes, and the salad was fresh — three weeks ago. She handed him a can of Michelob. Even it was flat.

"I'm sort of new in the kitchen," she confessed. "It's a good thing Judy's a gourmet cook."

Shayne threw open the refrigerator. It looked like they had been the grand prize winner in Supermarket Sweepstakes. He pulled out two thick and juicy steaks and threw them on the still-hot grill. Wrapping two large Idahoans in foil, he buried them in the coals. He sliced up some port wine cheese and put the appetizer on a plate with stone-ground crackers.

"What are you reading?" he called into the living room after

a while.

"Some short stories by Poe. I forgot. I've got Gothic Lit at 6:30."

"So you're planning to go to class after all that's happened?"

"I told you, Mike. This, as Billy Joel said, is my life, and I can't roll over and play dead because of some freak occurrence. I mean, it could have happened to anybody. Dark night, deserted campus, girl alone."

But it didn't happen to anybody, the redhead thought, though he said, "Di . . . eh, dinner is served." Shayne set the still sizzling steak platter down on the dinette, pushing aside her burnt-out efforts.

"Delicious," she said, cutting into her New York strip. "You'll make somebody a fine wife."

Sitting in the late-afternoon light that filtered through the Levolor blinds and her blonde hair, Shayne's dinner companion sparkled like a jewel in a display case. Between bites he admitted to himself that she was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen, and she was growing more beautiful by the moment. Staring into her glacier-blue eyes, he caught a glimpse of a woman long ago in another place who seemed just a bit nearer now. Phyllis. He hadn't thought of his dead wife for awhile, but even in his most intimate moments with Lucy, she was just around the corner of his consciousness.

"Something bothering you, Mike?" she interrupted. "Can't be the meal. It's definitely five-star."

"Thanks," said the redhead. He went over to the refrigerator and liberated another Michelob. "That Benny Hall kid? Do you think he attacked you last night?"

"I doubt it. Mr. Letter-Sweater is mostly talk. He's used to all the coeds tripping over themselves to get his attention. Last week Judy spent an entire afternoon sitting under the statue of Ponce de Leon because she knew he had to pass by on his way to football practice."

"What happened?"

"He never showed, but a flock of friendly pigeons did."

Shayne found himself chuckling along with her. It had been a long time between laughs, and he couldn't remember when he felt so much at ease.

"I like being with you, Mike," she said.

Shayne just smiled. He didn't want to think about what was happening, so he said, "Who's Bradley Roth?"

As though somebody had punctured their balloon, the mood changed. "Look, Mike," she said, "I appreciate your concern, but

Roth's a part of my past, and I've already buried that coffin too deep to dig up."

How deep, Shayne wondered. He'd have made book that someone from that coffin had risen.

"Let's just throw this stuff in the sink," she suggested. "I've got class in fifteen minutes."

Shayne stood up and reached for the steak platter. She had the same idea. Their hands touched. Shayne could feel her warm breath on his cheek. Suddenly she had her arms around him. She pulled them closer together. He didn't fight the advance of her body. He looked down at her, half-surprised and half-knowing the inevitability.

Her lips were soft as she lightly caressed his mouth, ever narrowing the gap between them.

The front door flew open, and Judy scattered notebooks onto the sofa. Then, realizing what she had interrupted, she stopped. A look of shock took over her face as she said nervously, "I never thought I'd run into a Barbara Cartland novel coming alive in here. Now Harold Robbins maybe."

Nobody laughed.

V

SOMEWHERE IN HELL, THE REDHEAD THOUGHT, SATAN HAD opened a sno-cone concession and the Baltimore Colts were polishing their Superbowl rings. Mike Shayne was actually sitting in a college classroom. All around him students were filtering in and taking their seats. From their dress and the few snippets of conversation he picked up, Shayne realized he had been right about F.A.C. as a school catering to a more serious brand of student.

On his left Susan was trying to finish her last story before the bell. Judy leaned over and tapped him on his right arm. "You're going to love this class. Professor Darke is not your ordinary teacher. He doesn't lecture from stale notes. He makes the material come alive. He's a real performer."

As if on cue, the door opened, and a figure wearing a nineteenth-century frock coat, gray vest, and black tie strolled in. His wild black hair and long moustache matched his dark eyes.

"Awesome," squealed Judy. "Tonight the Professor is Edgar Allan Poe."

"This term he's already been Macbeth and Heathcliffe from *Wuthering Heights*," said the blonde.

"I can't wait to see what he does for Faulkner's 'Rose for Emily,' "

said Judy. "You know, it's about this woman who kills a man about to jilt her."

"Ssssh," said Susan.

Shayne had to admit the teacher was good. It seemed more like an evening at the theatre than a lit class. He found himself paying attention. Maybe part of that was he didn't want to think about what would have happened if Judy hadn't interrupted back at the apartment.

Darke, as Poe, was explaining a story called "The Black Cat." "You see," said the professor, "all of us have two selves — a conscious self and an unconscious self brewing beneath the surface."

Susan pressed against Shayne's bare arm. "That psychology simply fascinates me," she whispered. "Poe was a master at capturing the dark side of the human personality, the side that we don't like others to see."

"Yeah," said Judy. "My conscious self is sitting here taking notes while my other self is wondering what it would be like to sleep with a man from the nineteenth century."

One thought sat in Shayne's gut like a greasy burger — Roth had to be investigated whether Susan liked it or not. Did the city's righteous councilman have a dark side? For that matter, he thought, recalling the reality of Susan's past, did she?

GETTING INTO THE BAY SHORE COUNTRY CLUB HADN'T BEEN
difficult at all. A call to the number on the card he had been given at Susan's apartment informed him that Roth was playing in the Charity League golf tournament at the exclusive club. And the card itself was like a passkey at the gate.

Shayne pulled a Nikon from the Buick's trunk and pinned on a press card Tim Rourke had given him a while earlier. Nothing other than money was more welcome at a fundraiser than publicity.

The detective checked the board in the pro shop, then cut across the course for the fourth tee. His neck still ached from a night spent in the front seat of the Buick. Judy had offered him at a bare minimum the living room couch, but he had preferred the vantage point of the parking lot. If his own midnight guest of the previous evening had brought out the green monster in Lucy, he hated to think what would have appeared if she had learned that the very next night had been a progression to a *menage a trois*. Besides, something had been on the verge of happening between him and Susan, something that he wasn't ready for now. With her in class for most of the day, he had time to

poke around.

The first member of the foursome on the fourth tee had just hooked his tee-shot into the tall sawgrass off the fairway.

"Beautiful golf shot, J.D.," said a tall, graying man in a yellow cardigan. His half-whisper seemed to Shayne a deliberate mimic of a network sportcaster.

"Up yours, Brad."

"Watch your mouth, J.D. You know my daughter's caddying for me."

Shayne approached from behind the canary. He aimed the camera at the man's back and said, "Mr. Roth, do you mind? One more for the society page."

The redhead nearly dropped his Nikon. When the golfer in yellow turned, the thirty-two-tooth smile did not belong to the man who yesterday at Susan's apartment had given him the business card.

"Anything for press row," said Roth. "Every buck we make keeps another kid off the street."

As he snapped the filmless camera, Shayne began to wonder what was going on. The canary was obviously *the* Bradley Roth, so who was the dark suit at Susan's and why did he give out Roth's card?

The big detective rechecked the card as Roth drilled a two-wood down the fairway. "Mr. Roth," he said, pulling out a notepad as the foursome headed down the recently-mowed grass, "I need to verify a few things."

"Shoot."

"You live in Coral Gables?"

"Yes."

"City Council?"

"Two years now."

"Head up an anti-smut campaign?"

"Citizens Against Trash — C.A.T."

How long have you known Susan Hanson?"

Roth stopped. "I don't believe I know any Susan Hanson."

Shayne said, "Tall, blonde, good-looking woman in her twenties."

Roth shot a glance at the pretty teenager who was carrying his bag and looking for his ball. "Listen, Buddy," he said under his breath, "I don't know what you're trying to pull, but I'm a happily married man with a beautiful family. I think this interview is over. Now if you don't get lost, my next divot's going to be out of that red hair of yours."

He walked over to his daughter to line up an approach shot. Shayne watched as he took a backswing Jack Nicklaus would have approved of and said, "Be careful how you play the ball, pal. If you get off the straight and narrow, you don't find too many *Diamonds* in the rough."

Roth sliced the seven-iron into the rough of the adjoining fairway.

SHAYNE WAS LOCKING THE NIKON IN THE TRUNK WHEN HE heard someone clear his throat. It was Roth.

"Listen, buddy," he said with a trace of apology, "I was a little hasty back there."

"What's the matter, pal?" quipped the detective. "Couldn't you find your ball?"

"I told them I needed to go back to the clubhouse to get my wrist taped." Roth placed his alligator shoe on the Buick's battered bumper. "Between you and me," he said, "a few years ago I did know a young woman named Diamond who fits your description. It's a part of my past I'm not proud of, but it's over. I don't want those days public knowledge, but I will not pay a single cent of hush money."

The man's voice was broken, and Shayne could see what he was saying was hard on him. "You've got me wrong, pal," the detective said. "I'm just in the business of asking questions."

"Let's get one thing straight," said Roth. "If you pursue this matter, I promise you my lawyer will slap a suit on you faster than a J.C. Penney salesman. And if you need some references that Alden Johnstone can get the job done, just check up at Raiford."

Shayne decided it was Roth's best shot of the day.

VI

THE PARNASSIAN HEALTH CLUB WAS LOCATED ON AN EXCLUSIVE Coral Gables street. Shayne glanced at the sign's Greek lettering. It was about as Greek as a college fraternity. As long as he was checking up on Susan's past, the detective figured he'd better touch all the bases.

His main man on the street, Jerry King, had tipped Shayne that when Blythe-Smith, Susan's former employer, had gone to the great S-M parlor down below, one Heraclites Thorne had taken over his stable, or what fillies were left in it.

The health club was a perfect cover for Thorne's true business. He catered to a very rich clientele with limos and ladies of every size, shape, and color.

"May I help you, sir," said a squeaky-voiced receptionist who,

Shayne guessed, in a previous life had been a mouse.

"Tell your boss Mike Shayne wants to talk with him."

She relayed his message over an intercom, then sat back to nibble on a carrot stick while the big detective strolled around the plush reception area.

A double door at the end of the room burst open, and King Kong and his big brother grunted something that sounded like "Mr. Thorne wansta see ya."

As Shayne walked down the hall between them, he was overpowered less by their size than their odor. He was led into a spacious workout room filled with gleaming barbells and red-leather punching bags. Straining beneath a Nautilus was a small figure in sweat shorts and a tank top.

When Shayne approached, the man sat up on the board and faced the detective. Thorne looked to the redhead like he could double for that little guy on TV who always spotted "Zee plane." But his musculature suggested that Mr. Roarke would give this Tattoo no lip.

"This is a high-class establishment, Shayne," he said. "We don't let no trash clutter up the premises."

"Then you'd better call a couple of garbage trucks," said Shayne gesturing at the two gorillas. "You have a definite waste disposal problem here."

The pair of bodyguards moved toward him.

"Easy, fellas," said the short man, the sweat running over his face like a great falls. "If I need to throw him out, I'll do it myself. Before you leave," he said as he turned to the redhead, "tell me why you came all the way uptown?"

"I understand you recently acquired the jewels of Trevor Blythe-Smith."

"The collection was somewhat depleted, what with the loss of Jade and the disappearance of Diamond. Jeez, I heard she was some piece of resistance." He laughed at his own joke. "Still, there is the exquisite Opal, the stunning Sapphire, and Topaz. Hey, don't be embarrassed, Red. Lots of guys can't get it for free." He laughed again. "There's nothing wrong with paying to play."

Shayne ducked and said, "Are you interested in obtaining the lost jewels?"

"So who are you, Indiana Jones? You gonna go down to hell to retrieve Jade for me? And Diamond. She dropped outta sight like a Federal witness. Now take a hike, Shayne. I can't stand guys who'd

associate with me."

Suddenly Shayne felt himself lifted from the mat-covered floor.

"I would see you out myself," said the diminutive muscleman, "but I've already worked up a sweat."

AS THE TWO GIANTS STARTED CARRYING HIM THROUGH THE door, Shayne swung his feet up and pushed against the frame. The three men staggered backward and spilled into a pile.

Interlocking his fingers, Shayne swung and caught the first gorilla with a bone-crushing blow to the chin. "Nighty-night," said the redhead. "It's bedtime for Bonzo."

Rising from his knees, Shayne delivered a sweeping sidekick to Prince Kong's head. Eat your heart out, Garo Yepremian, thought the detective.

Shayne could have gone then, but he knew it helped his business — and his image — if he left a calling card for future reference.

Back in the weight room he found Thorne just buckling on a lifter's belt.

"You up to two-hundred-and-twenty pounds yet?" the redhead said.

"I never lifted that much shit at one time, but in your case I'll make an exception." Thorne picked up a dumbbell and hurled it. "Catch this, sucker."

Shayne sidestepped and kept coming. Thorne grabbed the rangy redhead's knee without having to bend over and took him to the floor.

"Things are a little more even down here," said Thorne.

If the letter-sweater he had fought at Susan's was concrete, Thorne was granite. The little giant's hands clamped Shayne under the thigh and the back of his neck. Thorne lifted the detective above his head and started to spin.

Shayne came down against a rack of barbells that turned over.

"Good things come in small packages, Red," said Thorne.

This was one package Shayne wanted to put the wrappings on quick. He shook off the dizziness, grabbed a nearby medicine ball, and rolled it hard toward the gloating midget.

Thorne's short legs could not move him out of the way in time, and he went tumbling like the headpin struck by a perfectly placed bowling ball.

Shayne crossed the room in a quick bound and grabbed Thorne's left hand. Like a hammerthrower he whirled around, then slung Thorne across the room. It didn't break the Olympic record, but the cracking

sound told the investigator that it broke something.

Thorne screamed. "My ankle, it's smashed. You bastard — now I won't be able to enter the Mr. Miami contest."

"Let's get the weight off your ankle," said Shayne, hoisting him by his lifter's belt. He removed a red-leather speedbag and replaced it with a red-faced hairbag, Heraclites Thorne.

As he stepped over the two escapees from Barnum & Bailey's, Shayne looked back. His arms and legs thrashing the air, the short whoremaster looked like a dangling spider.

When he reached Miss Mouse at the reception desk, the detective said, "Mr. Thorne says you can take the rest of the day off. He'll be hung up for awhile."

"Goody," she squeaked. "Now I won't have to be late for my assertiveness training class."

The rawboned P.I. stepped into the afternoon sun and fired up a Camel. He was about to get in the Buick when a limo long enough to be a hearse glided up. The door to the Parnassian Health Club opened, and a baby-faced girl came out.

What caught his attention was her blue and white clothing. It was a cheerleader's outfit with a red F.A.C. stitched across the breast.

VII

THE RUSH-HOUR TRAFFIC CLOGGED MIAMI'S MAIN ARTERIES, and in Shayne's mind things ran even less smoothly. He asked himself a single question — what was he doing on this case? Hell, it wasn't even a case, but it was certainly one manila folder Lucy didn't want to open.

What was it? What did he really have? One woman from his past had been attacked on a dark college campus. He didn't want to admit it, but in an urban sprawl like greater — or lesser — Miami, such violence occurred more often than a purse-snatching.

He added up the list. Benny Hall — he of the big mouth and hot pants. Brad Roth — a self-righteous Ward Cleaver who admitted to a relationship with Susan, but claimed it was over. Heraclites Thorne — a gentleman of leisure whose muscles went from toe-line to hair-line, but who obviously didn't even know who Susan was. So much for the minuses.

One plus loomed large. Who was the mystery man passing out Roth's business card?

But if he were being honest, Shayne decided, as he sat through the sixth light change, it wasn't the pluses and minuses that kept him

going, that caused him to shove everything else onto the backburner.

Yes, dammit. Susan Hanson. He hadn't been looking for it, didn't even want it, but still it had happened. The green light beckoned. He didn't start right away. Like a quick-growing vine she had sprouted outside his door one night, and he had looked up the next day to see how much their lives had intertwined.

Emotional relationships. Hell, why didn't they figure as easily as his cases?

The Buick slid into the empty slot in front of Susan's apartment. When he knocked on the door, Judy answered. She had on only a mesh football jersey. Something stood out on her chest more than the 36.

"Mike," she said, "close the door. It's a little breezy when this is all you've got on, if you know what I mean."

Shayne knew. He looked around. "I got tied up in traffic. Where's Susan?"

Judy put her hand on his shoulder. "Now don't blame her. Professor Darke always invites his students, at least some of them, out to his house on weekends. A little party so everybody gets to know everything about everybody. What could Susan do? She wants to keep her A. If he'd have asked me, I'd have gone, and," she laughed, "I'm barely making a C."

"Where does this Darke live?"

"Just a minute. Susan had a map." She began to rummage through some papers on the bar. "It's here somewhere. I told her to wait for you, that you're the kinda guy who'd have a good excuse for being late."

Shayne was worried. "Is this kind of thing normal, for professors to hold private parties at their homes?"

"Hey, most girls leap at that kind of tutorial." She turned back and faced Shayne. "Come to think of it, I've heard rumors that some girls go to these parties, get to liking the lifestyle so much they drop out."

"From school?" said the redhead.

"That's what I've heard, but it's probably only talk. Anyway, Susan said she was just going to put in an appearance, then come back and study her bio. You might even miss her if you go out there." She stretched, giving the rawboned redhead a closeup view of what she had to offer. "I was going to go down to The Singleton to see what's happening, but if you're going to wait, I'll keep you company. I'm sure we can find something to do — like touch football." Her laugh was nearly a giggle.

Shayne shook his head. "No, thanks. I hung up my cleats a while ago."

She smiled at him. "I don't know. You look like you've still got a few good yards left."

Without warning, her seductive smile vanished, and she threw herself into his arms. "Mike," she said, her voice quivering. "Behind you."

Shayne turned toward the front door. A large manila envelope lay on the carpet just inside.

Judy said, "Someone just shoved that into the room."

Shayne ran to the door and jerked it open. There was nobody there. He looked around. Nothing.

When he came back into the room, the brunette was stooping to pick up the envelope. He grabbed her shoulder and pulled her back.

"Hey," she said, "I love the caveman approach."

"I've learned to be careful of anybody bearing gifts," he said.

The redhead got down on all fours. The envelope was half-open — it hadn't been sealed well. Picking up a pencil from an end table, he probed. The envelope seemed safe enough.

Grabbing only its edges, he shook out the contents. Several photographs fluttered down to the carpet like dirty snow.

"My God," said Judy, "they're all of Susan."

Shayne counted over twenty 5x7 black-and-whites on the carpet. Susan walking to class. Susan sunbathing. Susan at the grocery. Susan in the library stacks.

Somebody had been stalking her with a 35 millimeter.

"What's that?" said Judy, pointing at a half-covered piece of paper.

Shayne penciled a photograph off the slip. On it had been typed a single line: SOON YOU WILL BE MINE.

THE SUN HAD DROPPED BEHIND THE AUSTRALIAN PINES, AND the Buick's lights bounced on and off the gravel road. Shayne hoped Darke was a better teacher than mapmaker, though from the way Judy had described the party, he seemed to have a lot of interesting sidelines. Was one of them photography?

As he dipped around a bend, he knew he had found it. The house, which looked like a remnant of the Old South, seemed out of place in lower Florida. A big frame mansion that had once glistened white had degenerated to a color that reminded Shayne of the fish skeletons that washed up on the beaches. A cupola with half a weathervane tilted to

the side and a scrolled balcony abruptly ended in a pile of rotted lumber.

Several cars were scattered across the lawn. If they hadn't been such late models, he would have thought them deserted there. Candles glowed in the windows, giving the illusion that the place was about to go up in flames and take Scarlett O'Hara's relatives with it. But when he got out of the Buick, one thing marked the Professor's home as unmistakably twentieth century — the fresh aroma of pot brewing.

Several men and women were camped out on the front porch in t-shirts and jeans. As he walked past them through the front door, he might as well have been a wraith for all the attention they paid him. Inside a girl sat naked from the waist up, but the guy in front of her was more interested in a line of white powder. Music seemed to come from everywhere — all of it loud. Shayne wondered if this were the sort of thing academics passed off as an extension course.

A girl not much bigger than a wild cat-tail tried to jam a brown glowing cigarette between the detective's lips, but he dodged and said, "Seen Professor Darke?"

She looked at him as though he were speaking Swahili and listed down the hallway. Shayne explored the first floor. It seemed a pharmaceutical warehouse. Another pattern struck him — the guys looked older than the girls, but maybe that was mid-life creeping up on him.

Where was Susan?

Half a dozen people he tried to talk with had not seen either Darke or Susan. In their state, though, Shayne doubted they had seen the sunset. It was time to try the second floor. As he reached the top stair, a guy in a Notre Dame sweatshirt held out his hand like a traffic cop, then pitched forward down the stairs. The redhead hadn't expected to find a supervised study hall, but the contents of this house did surprise him.

In the first room a couple reminded the redhead of a pair of alleycats in season. Another couple had a door discreetly closed, but the cracks in it made their lovemaking quite public. Finally a guy passed Shayne carrying a book, appropriately titled *Confessions of an Opium Eater*.

He heard giggles at the end of the hall.

"Are you sure this is good for you?" said Susan, very much alive.

"I've done it every day for a year, my dear," answered someone, "and look what it's done for me."

Shayne wished he hadn't left the .38 in the Buick. He burst into the

room from where the sounds came. For a moment every thing seemed topsy-turvy.

Then he realized that Susan Hanson and Professor Darke were hanging upside down from the ceiling like a pair of bats.

Shayne walked over to Darke. "So what are you playing for tonight's class, Count Dracula?"

"Come on, Mike," said Susan. "Why don't you try these inversion boots. They're great to straighten your back and increase your circulation."

"From what's circulating around this house," he said, lifting her off and placing her on the floor, "it'll take more than this latest health fad to straighten them out."

"This is the 80's," she protested. "College is not an ascetic experience."

"What's this, Introduction to Orgy 101?" spat out the big detective.

"Susan," said a still-hanging Darke, "why don't you take your uptight friend downstairs and give him his choice of things to mellow him out."

Shayne grabbed a sheet of paper and with a felt-tip marker wrote his name in huge letters. He held the placard up in Darke's face. "Mike Shayne's the name, pal, and I'm going to help you remember it."

He wadded up the paper, and as though the professor had been a bird performing a trick he shoved the wad in his mouth. Then he took Susan by the arm. "We're getting out of here."

"Mike," she said, "you're overreacting. They're just a bunch of kids smoking pot."

This wasn't the place to tell her about the pictures or the fact that somebody was really after her. He pointed through the door with the crack. "That look familiar?"

"Mike Shayne, you're a sonuvabitch. You just can't, won't, forget about my past. You're no different from the rest, are you? 'Once a whore, always a whore.' "

Maybe he was overreacting and maybe she was right, but somebody was after her. Darke manor wasn't the best place to protect her, much less argue with her. He took her hand and led her through the marijuana-laced living room and out the door.

"Have a nice day," called a wide-eyed coed.

Susan didn't say a word as she reluctantly got into the Buick. As Shayne started to pull out, he noticed a long limo slide up to the front stoop.

The big detective wouldn't have paid any more attention to it had the figure getting out of the rear not been a limping dwarf.

VIII

THE FRONT LAWN OF DARKE'S RUNDOWN MANSION HAD FAR fewer cars when Shayne pulled the Buick off the gravel road. The black limo still squatted in front like a large black bird feathering its nest. Two guys stood beside it smoking cigarettes and occasionally sipping from a silver flask. The older generation, too, he thought as he slipped around to the back.

Susan had been testy, explaining that though the party wasn't exactly a sorority mixer, it was the way things were, and besides, the man throwing the party was in charge of her grade.

"You've been compromising too long," he had said. "If you really want a new life, you've got to make a clean break."

She had shot back, "I thought you were a detective, not a preacher."

The words had spilled out before he had had time to think about them. "Damn it, Susan. I don't want to see you hurt any more. I care about you, a lot."

She hadn't said another word. He had dropped her at an out-of-the-way motel he had used before as a safehouse, then had headed back into the country. The pictures, he had decided, could keep till morning, but what was happening at Darke manor couldn't.

The backstairs he had seen when he had explored the house earlier were empty. No sooner had he crept to the top than he heard Thorne.

"You was nuthin' but a small-time campus pusher when I showed you where the big bucks were. I made you what you are today. How many college professors can afford to spend July in southeastern France and December in Hawaii?"

"But I tell you, this guy knows all about our operation and he's going to blow the whistle unless I get him what he wants," said a voice Shayne recognized as Darke's.

"You take orders from me. I'll take care of our love-sick calf when the time comes," said a now-screaming Thorne. "So if you don't want to go on no permanent sabbatical, you keep up your end of the bargain. Where are tonight's video-tapes?"

"I think I'll hold on to them for a while," said Darke. "I'd feel safer with a little leverage."

"You want leverage?"

Shayne heard a loud crash, then the familiar sound of knuckles molding flesh. Thorne did have a persuasive way about him.

"The next time you think," warned the pimp, "be sure it's about your books, not about broads."

Shayne crept back down the stairs. He had heard enough to have a good idea of what Susan had almost gotten herself into. Who'd have ever thought that the halls of academia would serve as a minor league feeder system for a major-league call-girl operation?

SHAYNE HADN'T EXPECTED LUCY TO BE IN WHEN HE OPENED the door of the Flagler St. office. He had called Susan and told her to stay put for awhile.

"Dr. Shayne, I presume," said the pretty brunette.

The big detective realized that his idea of dropping by to check his mail and for urgent messages had not been a good one. The hours since their last confrontation had not cooled Lucy's anger.

"How's the patient doing?" she said.

"Angel, pick a time and a place, and we'll sit down and hash this thing out."

"How about right here, right now," she said.

Reluctantly the redhead agreed.

Lucy got up from her seat. The lowcut, pink sundress accented her trim figure. "Tell me, Michael," she began, "how do you really feel about Dia . . . Susan?"

The question was not an easy one for her to ask, and an even harder one for Shayne to answer. How did he feel about the reformed prostitute? How far did caring go?

The phone began to ring. Neither of them moved. Finally, though, the secretary in Lucy got the better of her. She walked to the desk and lifted the receiver. "Michael Shayne Investigations."

She handed the phone to Shayne. "It's the police."

The detective listened intently, then said, "Thanks, Leo," and hung up.

"You look worried, Michael," she said.

"I've got to go," said Shayne.

"Got to? Michael, we just started to talk."

"It'll have to wait, Angel. They just found a man dead, and he had my name on him."

IX

FOR ALL THE TASTE IN LT. DORKMAN'S COFFEE, SHAYNE thought, if he wanted to burn a hole through his stomach, he might as well have drunk hot sulfuric acid.

"Well, Dork," said the redhead, "didn't anybody ever tell you that you're supposed to change the grounds at least once a week."

"Listen, spendthrift," said the Homicide lieutenant, "good coffee is like good wine. It gets better with age."

Shayne lifted his cup in a toast. "Here's to Cafe Dorkman. Last week was a very good week." He set the coffee on the desk. "Now, you didn't get me down here to rate your java."

Dorkman scattered some glossies in front of Shayne. "We got a tip early this morning. Took a little ride into the country, and that's what we found."

Shayne stared at the photos. The hanging, upside-down figure of Simon Darke looked like a slab of beef in the slaughterhouse. Blood was everywhere.

"Crime scene boys," continued the cop, "said somebody worked him over real well with a knife. His throat was slit, and he was stabbed over twenty times. Looks like the work of a real sicko."

Shayne torched a Camel. "Or somebody who wants you to think it is."

"Mike, you want to tell me why the victim had your name." Dorkman dropped a plastic bag in front of the detective that carried the smoothed-out note paper Shayne had written his name on the day before.

The big detective had a lot of respect for the older policeman. At a time when most vets were jumping ship for plush security jobs, Dorkman had stayed, and Will Gentry made it a point to see that the most promising up-and-comers were teamed with The Dork. "Give me twenty-four hours, Leo, and I'll give you the whole package. Trust me — I've got a personal stake in this one."

"O.K. by me as long as you don't say a thing, especially to the great Irish storyteller, Timothy Rourke, down at the *Daily News*. This one has real headliner potential — a college professor, wild party, drugs, brutal killing. That stuff sells."

"One condition," said Shayne.

"What's that?"

"You change the grounds," Shayne said, looking at the leak that had developed in the styrofoam cup, "or patent this stuff as battery acid."

SHAYNE WENT INTO THE RECEPTION ROOM OF THE PARNAS-sian Health Club and without saying a thing got on the elevator. He

pushed Penthouse.

When the doors opened, he saw Thorne sitting at the end of a long table filled with jars and all sorts of breakfast foods. The worm was not an early bird.

The Kong brothers turned toward him.

"I don't want you in here, Shayne," said the dwarf, "and I ain't real enthused about your last visit either."

"Send your apes out to swing, Thorne."

"Why should I?"

"Because you want to talk to me about your late-night meeting with Simon Darke."

"I do?"

"Or you can talk with Dorkman down at Homicide. Make up your mind. For you, that's not a difficult job."

"What you talking about Homicide for?" The dwarf popped a couple of pills.

"Somebody wanted a slice of your bacon last night and did a little carving on Darke."

"No shit. Hey, you guys take the air."

The gorillas exited the room as if he had been an animal trainer.

Shayne stared over the smoke from his Camel. "In light of your business arrangement with Darke, I think the police would find your threats to him last night quite interesting."

"Business arrangements, threats? What you been smoking, Shayne?"

"Let me tell you a story. Once upon a time there was this small-time pimp who finds that he's got a shortage of . . . ladies-in-waiting on his hands. The kingdom's johns are tired of your basic street wenches, so one day the little pimp notices that a small-potatoes pusher who's really into him doubles as the royal tutor. Eureka — a month later it hits the little pimp, and the pusher becomes a recruiting sergeant for the wicked whoremaster's dastardly plan. He takes the most promising ladies out to his manor, dopes them up, and takes pictures of how they act for blackmail."

"Nice fairy tale, but you ain't so damned smart," Thorne said, deep-throating a banana. "Some of them pom-pom girls do it willingly. They can make more bread in less time serving a few johns than a few drinks."

"But," continued Shayne, "there was trouble in the kingdom. Somebody got his hooks into the Royal Procurer and was going to spill

the beans about his arrangement unless the Procurer switched allegiances."

"Yeah, that guy wanted one of the broads. I tell you, Shayne, that's one of the real hassles in this biz. These johns actually fall for my pavement princesses." He laughed gutterally. "Can you imagine actually falling for a whore. Shit, you use these tramps till you've worn them out, then you flush them."

Shayne kept his temper.

"Listen," continued Thorne, "I ain't no college graduate, but I'm smart enough not to kill the golden goose. You don't get rid of something until it won't work for you no more."

"What do you know about the blackmailer?" said the redhead.

The dwarf sliced open a grapefruit. "The guy wasn't a regular john. Somehow he stumbled into our operation. Said he had a long-time thing for one of the broads Darke was cultivating."

"Who was the guy?"

"Damned if I know."

"Which one of the girls was he interested in?"

"Some blonde. Who can tell one piece of meat from another."

That was it. Shayne invoked the Popeye Principle — "I stands all I can, I can't stands no more." He picked up the remaining grapefruit half and screwed it into the startled dwarf's face.

"Bon appetit, maggot," he said.

SHAYNE HANDED HIS CARD TO THE ZOMBIE-LIKE BUTLER. HE
had drawn a diamond around his name.

"I doubt he'll see you, sir. Saturdays are reserved for the family."

"I'll wait."

A minute later the butler reappeared at the entranceway. "Follow me, sir."

Shayne was led through the spacious house. It looked to the redhead like something out of *Mansion Beautiful*. Totally artificial. Amidst the dried flowers and dustless furniture, there wasn't a single spot on the rug, lump on the couch-chair grouping, or art object out of place.

Roth sat in a webbed chair at the shady end of the pool. He was coaching a pig-tailed girl with a missing tooth in the finer points of the dog paddle. A tall woman with dark skin that looked like it had been built up layer by layer, day by day, lay on a thick terry-cloth towel in the near sun.

Shayne hated to intrude on Roth's privacy, but who better fit the

picture of the man in the middle of this whole mess than the White Knight of Cleanup, the head of Citizens Against Trash. After all, Roth was in the perfect position to stumble upon the Darke-Thorne partnership. And, if the mystery man had a long-time thing for one of the girls, a blonde, Roth had his past relationship with Susan.

"Mr. Shayne," said the trunk-clad councilman, "I'll show you the poolhouse. Maybe you can tell me what the problem is."

The tanned woman never looked up as the detective walked by toward a poolhouse that was a miniature version of the main house. Shayne had a feeling that if the dog-paddler were going down for the third time, she might move — if her back were done.

"Shayne, you crud," said Roth as they entered the poolhouse. "I told you all I knew. What are you doing here?"

"Were you home all night?"

"Ask my older daughter, if she ever gets up. I hosted a pajama party for teenage girls. Will twelve witnesses do?"

"Sounds like a good jury to me."

"I'm trying to be patient," said Roth, the sweat running off his forehead. "What's this visit all about?"

"A man was murdered — brutally."

"First you show up and try to tie me to a woman I knew briefly years ago. Now you're trying to link me to a murder. I'm calling my lawyer, Johnstone. He's been with me a long time, and he's taken care of guys like you before."

Shayne wasn't a lie detector, but he sensed the man's moral outrage was genuine. A sudden thought cast its shadow on the redhead's mind.

"Just out of curiosity," he said, "when you had your relationship with Diamond, did Johnstone have anything to do with it?"

"It's really none of your damned business, but if it'll get rid of you, I'll tell you. A man in my position can't be seen with certain people. So Alden used to make all the arrangements. He'd book her flights, her hotel rooms. He'd even chauffeur her back and forth for me on occasion."

"Is he also the lawyer for C.A.T.?"

"Of course."

"What does he look like?"

"Thin and tall. Always stoops now. He once told me his lifelong dream was to be a basketball center, but he was so embarrassed about

his gangly body he couldn't bear to go into the locker room with the other guys. He's graying around the temples and is in his late 40's. Why?"

"You got a phone?"

Roth pointed to the wall. Shayne dialed Susan's motel room. No answer.

Shayne hung up and said urgently, "What's Johnstone's address?"

X

ON THE WAY TO JOHNSTONE'S MIAMI BEACH HOUSE, SHAYNE used the mobile phone twice. Both women seemed irritated by his call — Judy, because she had been waiting up all night for Susan, and Lucy, because he had said he couldn't come back immediately to finish their promised conversation. Still, the calls confirmed his gut feeling — Susan had been snatched from the motel.

The redhead knew he could go back to the motel and snoop around for clues, but there wasn't time for that. The message that had been hung in the back of his mind since yesterday afternoon, SOON YOU WILL BE MINE, flashed neon.

The address was at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac. Under the noon sun, the street was deserted, and the only noise was the Buick's perforated muffler.

He could have called ahead. He could have rung the bell. He could have waited patiently at the gate. Sure, he thought, and Fidel Castro was going to petition for statehood.

The Buick's battered nose rammed the decorative gate, dragging the wrought iron several yards down the concrete driveway. The car skidded to a halt in front of a plaster statue of a half-goat, half-man with pointy ears and cloven hooves. Shayne had a good idea what the figure was smiling about.

He picked the front door lock in record time, hoping Johnstone didn't have a good security system. If he were wrong, the lawyer was going to have his butt in a felony sling. Still, if he had to take a few chances to save Susan, so be it.

The huge house seemed deserted. In contrast to Roth's antiseptic decor, Johnstone's looked like it had gone a year or more without being touched. Clothes hung over living-room furniture, yellowed news-

papers were strewn across the den floor, unwashed china covered every surface in the kitchen, and half-empty wine bottles multiplied in the dining room.

The winding front stairs seemed to Shayne a bridge to another world. The gold carpet was thicker, and the walls seemed almost to glitter as the noonday light cascaded through a mammoth sun-dome.

The big detective saw his ruddy-completed face reflected in crystal chandeliers, glass-top tables, and ornate mirrors. He had to blink his eyes to escape the brightness, and he felt momentarily disoriented.

What a difference between the two floors, he thought, remembering Darke's lecture as Poe on the two selves of human personality. He checked behind some closed doors and found beautifully decorated, but seemingly unlivued-in rooms. He worked his way down to the end of the hall to what he thought must be the master bedroom. When he opened the door, he knew he wouldn't be facing Johnstone in court, at least not over a B&E charge.

Shayne barely noticed the black leather and polished chrome furniture because of the pictures. Pictures on the walls, pictures on the dresser, pictures framed; pictures taped to chairs, even pictures strewn across the black-fur-covered bed.

All were of Susan.

But where were the love-stricken photographer and his unwilling model?

Spotting a closet whose door was half-open, Shayne walked over to it. Had Johnstone been in a hurry to leave? The detective groped along the darkened inside walls for a light. His meaty finger tripped a switch. He heard a soft whirr. He hit another switch. A light flashed on.

The rear wall of the closet was rising into the ceiling to reveal another closet. Shayne moved through the narrow passageway. On the left side hung a series of uniforms — baseball, football, basketball. The redhead pulled out a green Dolphins jersey. Across the back was stenciled the name JOHNSTONE.

On Shayne's right hung a female wardrobe that would have made Frederick's of Hollywood's seem conservative. All the pieces were white, scanty, and transparent.

At the end of the closet was a full-length, gilt-edged frame containing a picture of Susan like none of the others. She was younger, and her face was much more heavily made up. Shayne remembered when

he had first met Diamond, the decorated jewel in Blythe-Smith's collection of call girls. Johnstone's obsession *had* begun when he was Roth's go-between.

So this self-conscious, middle-aged scarecrow was playing out a life-long fantasy of sports hero. A fantasy played out everyday by grade-school bookworms and TV jocks from their barstools. But there was one big difference — they didn't impose their fantasies on innocent coeds.

Shayne noticed the large picture was a bit askew. As he moved it to the left, his eye caught something. He lifted the heavy frame from the wall. Behind the picture was a thick glass plate.

Johnstone hadn't flown the coop.

On the other side of the glass the lawyer, wearing an F.A.C. letter-sweater and chinos, was down on one knee gesturing imploringly. The object of his pleas was Susan. She was cowering in a near foetal position in a corner. She still had on the clothing she was wearing when Shayne had dropped her at the motel. The detective recognized the fear in her eyes — he had seen it many times on the street. The fear of not knowing. Who are you? What do you want from me? What are you going to do to me?

SHAYNE SHATTERED JOHNSTONE'S MIRROR AND FANTASY with a single kick. The glass scattered into the lawyer's fairyland prison. Carefully Shayne edged through the jagged shards into a brilliantly white room. The windowless walls were white, the furniture was white. The chamber was dominated by a white canopied bed.

The tall lawyer grabbed a long fork of glass. He stood between Shayne and the blonde.

"Mike," she sobbed, "get me out of here."

Keeping his eyes fastened on the now-erect Johnstone, the redhead said, "Are you all right, Susan?"

"No," she screamed. "He kidnapped me from the motel this morning. He followed you to Professor Darke's."

"Darke is dead." The big detective stared at Johnstone's hand, which, gripping the ragged glass so tightly, had started to bleed. "Somebody slit his throat."

"Oh, my God," she wailed.

Shayne looked the lawyer in the face. His eyes stared through the redhead as though locked on an object impossibly far away. "I don't

understand," Johnstone said to Susan. "That hypocritical Roth was good enough for you. That empty-headed jock was good enough for you. Even that sleazy professor was good enough for you. Why wasn't I?"

"Mike," she said, "he wants to keep me here in this perverted shrine."

"In time," said the lawyer, "I know you'll come to love me as I do you." He waved the piece of glass over his head as though he were a God about to hurl a thunderbolt.

Shayne's fingers inched around his back toward the cold-steel reality of his Smith & Wesson.

"They were right," said Johnstone.

"Who's 'they'?" said the redhead, trying to reason with the wild-eyed figure.

"My parents. They taught me that my body was dirty, sinful. That the right way was through the mind. How foolish my dream of the flesh has been, how stupid to think that I could escape their teachings."

His arms began to flail like a drowning man. Shayne's fingers wrapped around the butt of the .38.

"I have sinned," Johnstone shouted, "and I must atone. I must sacrifice."

He took a step toward the blonde who covered her face.

Shayne whipped up the gun.

"Forgive me for what I have done," the lawyer pleaded.

Before Shayne could react, Johnstone raked the ragged shard across his throat. As he dropped to his knees, the red blood of the past smeared the white walls and a shrieking Susan.

XI

SHAYNE OPENED THE DOOR TO HER APARTMENT FOR SUSAN.

"Such a strange man," she said.

It was the first thing she had said since they had left Johnstone's prison. He had promised Dorkman over the phone that he'd fill the cop in on the details later.

"You know," she continued, as the color returned to her cheeks, "that day I saw Johnstone here I wasn't afraid of him. I just thought that his appearance signaled Bradley Roth's wanting to renew our relationship. All those times Alden picked me up at those faraway

airports he was always so gentlemanly. Even when he took me from the motel, I thought he wouldn't hurt me."

The redhead said, "That glass knife looked pretty dangerous to me."

"Yes," she said, "but he used it on himself. I don't think he could hurt a fly."

Shayne remembered the photo of Darke's blood-covered body dangling from the exercise bar.

"Fly," said a familiar voice from the staircase. "What do you want to know about flies?" It was Judy with a huge, dark-bound book in her hand. "Since last night, I've become probably the world's number-one authority on fireflies."

"Judy," said Susan with apology, "I should have called you from the motel last night no matter how late it was."

"Hey, roomie, if I'm ever at a motel with a hunk, don't expect a call from me. But I'm not gonna go to a motel, not even if Benny Hall breaks down the door and drags me away. I'd rather sit here and read about fireflies. Did you know male fireflies outnumber females 50 to 1? What odds. It says right here that the female is the predator, the aggressor. I'll bet female fireflies don't get crapped on by pigeons."

"I'm famished, Mike," said Susan. "Let's send out for some pizza."

"Why import heartburn," said Judy, "when you have The Giggling Gourmet at your disposal. I bought a couple of nice steaks the other day that I won't be needing for Benny and me."

"Whoops," said the redhead.

Susan added, "What Mike means is that he cooked those steaks for us because I burned . . ."

"Oh. I'll find something else. You two lovebirds just sit still, and old Judy'll take care of everything."

Shayne sat down beside Susan. Her hand was still a little shakey. He reached over and gently took it. She rested her blonde head on his shoulder.

The years melted away. The redhead had a strange feeling, partially of de ja vu. He saw another young woman, wild in her youth, in over her head. He had had to throw her a life preserver too. Susan's eyes and hair were different, but her laugh, her impetuousness, her outlook, the way she fit the contours of his life were the same. He thought of Tim Rourke's words of comfort: "You never really get over the first

one, shamus."

Phyllis, the wife he had loved so much, the wife he couldn't keep from dying. It was almost enough to make him halfway believe in reincarnation.

"I've almost got the Waldorf ready," called Judy. "As soon as I slice these apples. Mike, while you wash your hands, I'll give Susan a lesson in Elementary Saladmaking."

As he walked up the stairs, Shayne was a bit unsettled, and it was more than his feelings about Susan. He turned on the water and let it run. Something she had said about Johnstone a minute ago. His behavior was contradictory.

He threw open the door to the first bedroom. Nothing. He spun around to the other.

The bile rose to the top of his throat. Just as in the story Judy had said she couldn't wait for, the figure in the crimson-soaked letter-sweater lay in Susan's bed. *Taxi drivers don't return lost books.*

He bolted downstairs. As his foot hit the first-floor carpet, he saw the kitchen knife plunge into Susan's unsuspecting breast.

"Every man that ever looked at happy-go-lucky Judy, sexy Susan took away," said the brunette in an almost-mechanical voice.

Shayne's hand groped for the .38.

"I tried to get you Wednesday night," said Judy, the blade striking again.

The gun came out as the redhead took another step.

"So here's for Simon Darke and Benny Hall."

"Damn you, Judy," Shayne yelled.

"Now," she said, "it's just you and me, Mike."

The first slug caught the blonde in the middle of her disbelieving face. The second, just behind the left ear as her head twisted.

She was dead before the third and fourth pierced her body.

Shayne cradled the bleeding blonde in his strong arms. You failed again, a voice shouted within him.

Susan looked up at him through tired eyelids. "Do you, do you love me, just a little?"

Her blue eyes closed before she could hear his answer or feel the warm drop strike her cheek.

Detective-Lieutenant Cathy Carruthers was tall, beautiful, and efficient, but even she occasionally made a mistake — like this time, turning her back on a killer. Without warning, the man struck!

The \$1.49-Day Killer

by MEL D. AMES

IT WAS AN EARLY, TUESDAY, MID-SUMMER MORNING. THE main drag that ran through Metro's ethnic East End was deserted and ominously quiet. The only sound was the rhythmic scuffling of Hymie's slip-shod feet as he kitty-cornered across the empty thoroughfare toward his place of business.

HYMIE LIPSHITZ KOSHER MEATS

He was relieved to see from a distance that the expensive, gold block-lettering was still apparently intact on the plate-glass window. Then, as he drew closer, he caught a first glimpse of the spray-can graffiti that had been added overnight, exhorting him to assault himself in all manner of obscene and impossible ways. But it was not

until he stood directly in front of the window, peering between the "R" in KOSHER and the "M" in MEATS, into the dim interior of the store, that he saw the girl.

"*Oy! Vos iz dos?*" Hymie's gentle Jewish face took on the color of uncooked matzah. "*A naket mendl?*"

Last night, before locking up, Hymie had dutifully cleared away all the meat he had on display, leaving clean, empty trays in both the counter and casement coolers. The three shiny meat-hooks that hung inside the window area, had been left dangling idly from the rack. Now, inexplicably, those same meat-hooks were crudely laden with two whole carcasses of dressed beef. And wedged grotesquely between them (God preserve us!), brutally impaled on the third hook, was the dead and denuded body of a young woman.

And *Oy!* (to add insult to infamy) one of his own plastic price-tags had been skewered into a shapely flank, *offering the comely cadaver for sale to the public, in whole or in part, for \$1.49 lb.*

THE EARLY ORANGE SUN HAD ONLY JUST BEGUN TO RISE above the rooftops when Hymie stood in the open doorway of his shop, waiting for the arrival of the police. He was doing his best to shoo away the rubbernecking ghouls who had begun to gather, drawn by the scent of death like flies to carrion. They seemed to materialize out of nowhere, to *Ooo!* and *Aah!* and add their flattened, runny nose-prints to the scurf of graffiti that already befouled his window. But for all his threats and wheedling, they refused to budge. That is, until Metro's finest came careening onto the scene in the guise of an unmarked gray Chevy; like a giant can of RAID (Hymie thought) disinfesting everything around it in a cloud of bureaucratic dust. He coughed, and blinked, and waited stoically for the dust to settle, then stood rooted in disbelief as the police car began to disgorged its human cargo.

This, Hymie marveled, was the goyim politsey?

A six-foot blonde beauty (*Lynda Carter, who else?*) had alighted from the near side of the car, with a flagrant flash of silken thigh that would have brought the law down on a Las Vegas peeler. And who should be coming around the car to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with her on Hymie's own little piece of sidewalk? *John Wayne (rest his soul), that's who.* He'd know him anywhere; with the swagger and the big grin, the laughing blue-gray eyes, straight up from Hollywood & Vine, no doubt, with barely time enough to switch duds and pick out a new leading lady.

"Good morning," Lynda Carter says to him, "are you Mr. Lipshtiz?"

Hymie acknowledged that he was, indeed, that person, then waited a little apprehensively for her next move. He was half expecting her to go into a spin on the spot, then do a *ta da*, moments later, and emerge from a puff of smoke in tiara and leotards.

Instead, she said, "I am Detective-Lieutenant Cathy Carruthers," with a melting smile, "Metro Central, Eleventh Precinct, Homicide." She flipped a badge before his eyes and nodded toward her companion. "This is my partner, Detective-Sergeant Mark Swanson."

The big detective shuffled his size twelves. "Ya got a dead body hereabouts?" he drawled in typical Duke-like fashion.

Hymie pointed nervously to the bovine and human remains that still hung cheek to jowl in the window of his shop. "There," he said with an involuntary shudder. "*Oy. Such a shmutz!*"

"I'm not sure what that means," the lieutenant said as she entered the shop, "but I think I can guess." When she caught sight of the youthful corpse, so rudely indisposed, she told Hymie, "Get a sheet or a tarp and curtain on that window." She glowered back in disgust at the ogling crowd. "And, Mark, get rid of that horde of weirdos out there, before one of them comes creeping in with \$1.49, looking for a pound of flesh."

Hymie obediently shuffled away in search of a sheet for the window, wondering why he hadn't thought of so obvious a deterrent himself; while Mark let loose with a street-clearing bellow that sent gawkers and ghouls (and a few innocent bystanders) scrambling for cover. And every pigeon in a quarter-mile radius was suddenly wheeling skyward in frenzied flight.

The lieutenant seemed to vibrate like a tuning fork as she stood with her eyes closed, waiting stiffly for the din to die down. When it did, she said "Mark," with measured calm, "in the unlikely event that H.Q. has not already heard you, will you please get on the horn and let them know we've got a female 'defuntee' out here?"

Mark hesitated, with a glance of feigned indecision toward the towering heart of the city, then he shrugged his heavy shoulders, winked, grinned, and headed for the Chevy.

The lieutenant called after him, "Tell them to stir their stumps, Mark. I want prints and pictures of this mess before anything is touched. And you'd better let the chief know we've got ourselves another dead doxy — victim number four, looks like, in the \$1.49-Day

killings."

MARK SWANSON STOOD AT THE OPEN DOOR OF THE CHEVY with the radio-mike clamped in his big fist. He was confirming to the young female dispatcher at H.Q. that a new murder had, indeed, taken place in Metro's infamous East End. He was telling her, with measured patience, that he would consider jurisprudence to be well served, if (between the snaps, crackles and pops of her No-Trouble-Double-Bubble), she could find the time to acquaint the Special Team in Homicide with that bothersome bit of trivia.

But even as he talked, his thoughts had drifted elsewhere. He was trying to recall (with one reflective eye on his beautiful partner), just what he had ever done to occupy his time and his mind, before Cathy Carruthers had entered his life and chosen him as a team-mate.

The Amazon they called her. And with reason.

For the better part of two years now, in her relentless pursuit of law and order, Cathy Carruthers had been stalking Metro's concrete jungle with the mien of a marauding tigress, and (to Mark's libidinous delight), the unbridled pulchritude of a Penthouse Pinup. Her outrageous beauty and recurrent feats of sheer animal strength and cunning had long since become legendary. And while Mark was no more immune than his awestruck colleagues to the ego-bruising mystique of the Amazon, he, as her constant companion, had developed a special, more personal relationship with Cathy Carruthers, the woman. It was an intimacy that, though still mutually unacknowledged, had, from the very beginning, been secretly and shyly reciprocated.

When Mark re-entered the shop, the lieutenant had climbed into the window display area to more closely examine the bizarre, triple heft of slaughter that hung there. The little proprietor had joined her, and was busy draping a canvas sheet across the window, muttering under his breath about what the world had finally come to, being now, in his view, no longer neither kind nor kosher.

Certainly, it had not been kind to the young lady who had been left to dangle forlornly on the hook. Her head was toppled forward, obscuring her face, and her long raven hair cascaded down her naked front like a billow of black water. A congealing of blood and hair had formed an ugly brown scab between her breasts, and a network of bloody little rivers had criss-crossed the velvet expanse of her torso, like a maze of southbound routes on a roadmap of Wyoming; zigzagging over and

around the hills of her breasts, down and across the rolling plain of her abdomen, puddling here, and there, in the hollows and valleys — and converging, finally, in one copious, violent splash along the insides of her thighs.

The lieutenant reached out to part the veil of black hair that hid her face. She might have been pretty once. Now, two unblinking green eyes stared out at her, frozen wide in death and terror, the bloodless lips curled back in a silent scream. A startled fly crept from the open cavern of the mouth. It buzzed irately, as though to protest the intrusion, then darted away. A second mouth, the one that had given up her lifeblood, grinned up at the lieutenant from under the sagging chin, where it stretched from ear to ear.

"\$1.49 doesn't seem much for a human body," Mark said grimly over the lieutenant's shoulder. "Even if it is only that of a dead hooker."

"Too true," the lieutenant mused, "especially when you consider (monetarily, of course) that it would cost at least twenty dollars for just the *loan* of a *live* one."

Mark laughed. "Are you kidding? That might have been true B.I., lieutenant. Not any more."

"B.I.?"

"Before Inflation."

The lieutenant gave him a critical look. "How did you acquire all this sordid expertise?"

"I worked Vice, lieutenant, before I was transferred to Homicide." He smiled wistfully. "I've seen it all."

"Hmm. I can imagine. That would have been B.C., of course."

"B.C.?" Mark's ruggedly handsome face betrayed his bewilderment.

MARK WAS ABOUT TO RESPOND WHEN HE WAS JOSTLED to one side by the mass arrival of the Special Homicide Investigative Team. Photogs, Lab-men, Finger-printers, Morgue-meds, whatever; they all came crowding in through the door of the little shop, lugging the specialty equipment that would facilitate their separate and varied functions. The noise level was suddenly overwhelming. Every mother's son of them seemed to be speaking at once, obviously intent on the individual task at hand. Some barely gave a second glance to the broken body that hung so brutally from the hook.

In the midst of this orderly confusion, one man was struggling like

a bedbug in a beehive to retain a modicum of dignity. He was short, dumpy and balding, but there was an unmistakable air of authority about him. Officially, he was Samuel Morton, M.D., Coroner & Chief Medical Examiner, M.C.P.D. Unofficially (as he was fond of reiterating), he was "just plain Sam."

"So what do you make of it, just-plain Sam?"

The little M.E. looked up at the lieutenant without amusement. There was a condescending curl to his pursed lips. "*Pate de foie gras,*" he stated flatly.

Mark, at the lieutenant's elbow, raised his eyes and his eyebrows. "Whadhesay?"

"Chopped liver," she translated with a grimace, "or something just as nasty. And, as unenlightening."

"So what do you want from me, lieutenant?"

Cathy Carruthers ruffled the few remaining hairs on the M.E.'s peekaboo pate. "Sam," she said sweetly, "how about treating a lady to a crooked smile and a straight answer?"

The M.E. managed a reluctant, ill-humored grunt. A smile, even a crooked one, was out of the question.

"How long would you say she's been dead, Sam?"

"You want a wild surmise or a bold conjecture?"

"How about an educated guess?"

"Well," he mused grudgingly, "she's colder'n a dog's dinner. Rigor's pretty well established." He touched the inside of his wrist to the cadaver's clammy skin. "And I doubt that she'd go any more now than about, 75 degrees F. So, everything considered, and figuring a heat loss of roughly 3 degrees per hour, I'd have to say about — eight hours."

The lieutenant glanced at her watch. "That would peg the time of death at approximately ten o'clock last night."

Sam Morton shrugged his dumpy shoulders. "Give or take a smidgen."

"How long," Mark wanted to know, "is a smidgen?"

"How high is up?" the M.E. responded gruffly.

The lieutenant ignored her colleagues' idle persiflage. She appeared to be deeply engrossed in her own thoughts. "The girl obviously bled profusely before she died," she surmised aloud, "in an *upright* position. And what do you make of the fact that there's not one drop of blood on the floor beneath her? Weird. But what I'd like to know now, Sam, is precisely what caused her death. The slash to her throat? Or

that vicious hook embedded in her back? Either way," she sighed, "it would not have been a happy way to go."

"So who's entitled 'happy,' Lieutenant?" Hymie's muffled voice came from among the folds of the canvas sheet. "These days, *fest* isn't good enough!"

The lieutenant grinned. "You do have a point there, Mr. Lipshitz, but, unfortunately, this lady didn't die 'happy' or *fest*. What is your opinion, Sam?"

"My opinion, lieutenant, will be in the Autopsy Report, which I will duly and eventually complete, and, which you will duly and eventually receive. In the meantime, I'd be much obliged if you'd clear the hell out of here so that I can get on with my job. And lieutenant, how about taking the rest of this rabble with you? Especially this jerk with the camera —" He flinched as another flashbulb exploded. "For Chrissake, Charlie! Enough already. You've done everything now but get her to say 'cheese.' "

LATER THAT SAME MORNING AT METRO'S ELEVENTH Precinct, Chief Henry (Hank) Heller was pacing back and forth behind his desk, looking every bit the gray-headed old rooster he was reputed to be. Every so often, he would stop and peck a peek at his top investigative team, and the stringy wattles at his throat would tense and quiver with exacerbation.

"Do I read you right, lieutenant? Are you telling me that this Lipshitz fiasco is *not* the work of the \$1.49-Day killer?"

"Either that, chief, or the grave-yard detail picked up the wrong guy last night."

"What do you mean, the wrong guy? He confessed, didn't he?"

"So they tell me." The lieutenant crossed one gorgeous leg over the other, opened her red-leather shoulder bag, and balanced it delicately on the rounded plateau of her thigh, just above the knee. The chief eyeballed the teetering bag with acute apprehension while the lieutenant, oblivious to the trauma she was inducing, calmly proceeded to trim and polish her beautiful blood-red talons. Mark, meanwhile, was a vision of domestic bliss. He was hunkered down in his chair, comfortably catnapping, flaunting an idiotic half-smile on his upturned, dreamy dial.

Hank Heller suddenly stopped his pacing and dumped himself wearily into the chair behind his desk. "Why do I feel like a kid at a circus every time I get together with you two?" he lamented. He shook

his craggy head, thrust out his chin, and glowered at the two detectives. "It pains me no end to break up your little high-wire act," he cooed with a deadly syrupy malice, "and I hate like hell to disturb that comatose beach-bum you call a partner. *But*, if you don't soon justify that last remark, lieutenant, you may find yourself performing out on the corner of Pan and Handle for the price of a cup of cold coffee."

The lieutenant reacted to his ultimatum with a tolerant sigh and a slow, forgiving smile. She dutifully rescued the bag from its precarious perch, then nudged her burly partner with her elbow. "Mark, did you bring those enlargements with you?"

Mark, with an economy of speed and effort that would have shamed an aging tortoise, reached down beside his chair to retrieve a brown manilla folder. "These are the three shots we had on file," he said with sleepy accord. "The photo-lab will be sending up number four, from the batch they took this morning — soon's it's ready." He yawned and glanced expectantly toward the door. "Should be here directly."

Then, as though by divine decree, the door took that prophetic moment to rumble ominously on its hinges. It opened wide enough to give ingress to a head, a hand, and a brown manilla folder. In that order.

"Here's that pretty snap you wanted, lieutenant," the head said brightly.

Chief Heller buried his face in his hands with a hopeless groan. But curiosity soon compelled him to peek out between his fingers to see what could possibly happen next. He was just in time to see the lieutenant dismiss the courier with a rewarding smile, then march herself magnificently across the office to the notice-board that all but dominated the north wall. The chief followed, moving only his eyes. To look at her, he thought, you'd think she was about to join Charlton Heston at the foot of the mountain with a revised, modern version of the Top Ten.

"BEHOLD!" THE LIEUTENANT SAID WITH A FLOURISH AS SHE finished pegging up the four 12-by-14 enlargements in a horizontal row across the board. She had turned with a defiant toss of her honey-blonde head to face the chief. "These are the actual photographs," she stated, "that were taken at the scenes of the murders. During the last four months, on the second Tuesday of each month, May through August, these bizarre killings have coincided with the \$1.49-Day sales events that have long been traditional with department stores in

Metro — ”

She paused to frown down at the chief until he reluctantly took his face out of hiding. And Mark decided it was as good a time as any to straighten up a little in his chair.

“Accordingly,” she continued, in the tritely edifying tones of an eighth-grade schoolmarm, “the murders have now become synonymous with \$1.49-Day, and the killer has been aptly labeled, by the Media, as the \$1.49-Day Killer.”

The chief looked at Mark with Orphan Annie eyes. “Leapin’ lizards!” he whispered against his palm in exaggerated mock amazement. “Did you know that?”

Mark responded with a quick grin and a noncommittal “Arf!”

The lieutenant was not amused and she chose simply to ignore them. She turned back to the board and resumed her graphic dissertation.

“I needn’t point out that all four of these photographs (*vis-a-vis* the murders) have the same \$1.49-Day theme in common. That is obvious. And there are other similarities, as well. The nudity of the victims, for instance, the fact that they are all women, and prostitutes, the display window locations, to mention only a few. But we have already discussed these factors at length, and I’ll not enlarge on them at this time.”

“The point I would like to make, however, and the one singular aspect of these murders that most intrigues me now, is not their obvious *similarities*, but rather the subtle way in which this last one seems to *differ* from the others.” She turned slowly, almost esoterically to face them. “Gentlemen, do you not agree?”

HANK HELLER AND MARK GLANCED QUIZZICALLY FROM THE lieutenant to each other, then back to the row of photographs on the board. The two men had become suddenly, quietly serious. The four murder scenes, so brutally depicted, blown up into 12-by-14 colored glossies, were not a joking matter. They were nightmare images of mortal horror that had been awesomely frozen in time by the photographer. They studied them gravely in this new context, each one in turn:

The first enlargement (labeled: *Tuesday, May 9*) was of a glass-lidded coffin, revealed in all its ornate grandeur in the display window at the Chapel Of Chimes. Freshly cut flowers of every variety and color abounded against a backdrop of pastoral splendor. It would have been a somberly restful scene had it not been for the naked young

woman imprisoned within the casket; a frail, black-haired beauty, in the rigid throes of her last agony, eyes glassy, wide with panic, mouth agape, fingers bent into claws against the underside of the glass lid. She had been *asphyxiated*. Buried alive, in effect. And strewn over the transparent lid, was a crumpled dollar bill and forty-nine cents in loose change.

The second photograph (labeled: *Tuesday, June 14*) was taken from a similar viewpoint; looking in through the plate-glass window of the Metro School Of Hairdressing. Pictured, was a row of upholstered chairs with overhead dryers paralleling a mirrored counter that faded back into the dim interior of the shop. In the chair closest to the window, a woman in her early twenties was slumped in a nude, unladylike sprawl, her hair seemingly still entangled in the overhead dryer. She wore a death-mask that had been grotesquely fashioned by a sudden, surging charge of high voltage from the dryer. She had been *electrocuted*. And on the mirror behind her, \$1.49 had been scrawled in foot-high numerals, in a glaring fluorescent shade of red lipstick.

The third photograph (labeled: *Tuesday, July 12*) immortalized Gruber's East Side Confections. It was a 7-11 type catch-all store, with tobacco, pop, magazines and party accoutrements in motley supply. The camera peeked in through the glass entrance, revealing a check-out counter and a floor-to-ceiling rack of magazines in the immediate foreground. And further back, dividing the front check-out area from the shelved interior, was an old-fashioned, "help-yourself" pop cooler. The lid of the cooler was gapped open like a huge metal mouth, and draped over the lower jaw, half in, half out, was the contorted body of a naked woman. Only the buxom twin moons of her bottom and the backs of her long, dangling legs were visible to the camera: her head and torso were buried in the frigid, liquid bowels of the cooler. She had been *drowned*. And on the old-fashioned cash register that sat atop the counter, someone had rung up \$1.49.

The fourth and final photograph, taken that same morning at Hymie Lipshitz' East Side shop, had been labeled, *Tuesday, August 9*. It was a cruel replica of the scene met by the two detectives only hours before.

"Well?" The lieutenant stood stolidly before them, feet apart, hands on hips, a look of quiet expectation on her exquisite, inscrutable face.

"Well, what?" The chief pursed his lips and looked up at her through a one-eyed squint. "Each one's about as gruesome as the next

(Christ, what a butcher!), except — ”

“Except?”

“That last one, lieutenant. The one that came in this morning. Beauty and the Beefs.”

The lieutenant rolled her eyes at his rather apt description. “Well,” she prompted, “what about it?”

“It’s the only one that drew blood.”

The lieutenant smiled tightly with grim accord. “Precisely,” she said.

“Hey, now! Just a goldarn minute, lieutenant, Ma’m. You’re not getting off that easy.” The chief pushed himself to his feet and came around the end of the desk. “That bit about the blood doesn’t prove a damn thing. It could still be the work of the same guy. No M.O. is ever *exactly* the same, lieutenant. And as you’ve already said yourself, there isn’t any lack of similarities.”

“That’s true, chief, but I just wanted to point out that there is at least one significant inconsistency, even without the time factor.”

“The time factor?” The chief and Mark echoed the words in unison.

“Yes, gentlemen, the time factor. If Sam Morton was even remotely accurate in his Time Of Death guesstimate, then the man they picked up early this morning couldn’t possibly have perpetrated the Lipshitz murder. He was in jail.”

THE HEAVY STEEL-BARRED DOOR CLOSED BEHIND THEM with an ominous, no-nonsense *clank*. The lieutenant and Mark had just entered the detention area on the basement floor of the Eleventh Precinct.

“So the way it looks now,” Mark was saying, “is that we’ve either got a publicity-seeking nut on our hands, who didn’t commit *any* of the murders; or there are *two* \$1.49-Day killers, and one of them is still out there.”

“That about sums it up, Mark.” The lieutenant looked trim and nubile in a snug, gray skirt and white tailored shirt blouse. Her three-inch heels clicked out an erogenic rhythm as they traversed the concrete foyer toward the holding cell block. A second barrier glided open as they approached.

“Lieutenant. Mark.” Officer McConachie, an elderly, heavy-set Scot, greeted them as they entered. He was seated behind a small desk that was large enough, just, to hold an open body-count book and a cup of coffee. “I’ll ha’ to trouble you to soign in,” he told them

in a pronounced Highland brogue.

The lieutenant signed the book while Mark made an attempt at idle chit-chat. "Hey, McConachie," he joshed, "I hear you're renting out rooms on the side."

"Och, aye, Sarge." McConachie beamed. "Since the Force has went co-ed, I canna keep up wi' the demand." He gave them a sly look of appraisal, and an even slyer wink. Then, in a whispered aside to Mark, he added, "All I got this mornin' though, is a semi-private on Tier B."

The lieutenant straightened slowly, her eyes flashing like distant lightning. "It is my most fervent hope, Officer McConachie, for your sake, that you are merely jesting."

McConachie's Scottish face turned the color of a Clansman's kilt. "Eh? Oh, aye, Mam," he flustered, "now and what else would you be thinkin' — ?"

"McConachie," Mark interjected quickly, "we're here to interrogate the \$1.49-Day killer."

"Ah! So that's yourr business, is it?" The old Scot struggled to his feet. "It's that Nazi annihilatorr you'rre wantin'. Adolph Klause, he calls hisself. Bloody butcher, is what he is. Come along, then. Leave yourr weapons herre, and I'll take you to 'im."

A few moments later, the two detectives were following McConachie down a steel and concrete alley marked Tier C, to the brash accompaniment of wolf whistles and lurid cat calls. Faceless hands and fingers made obscene gestures at the lieutenant from between the bars on either side. By the time they had reached the end of the Tier, where an isolated cell stood back, out of sight and sound of the others, the lieutenant was beginning to look thoroughly discomfitted.

The old Scot opened the cell door, stood back as they entered, then locked it behind them. "Jus' gimme a shout when you'rre thrrough," he said as he moved away. Under his breath, he muttered, "Damn celibates."

The lieutenant turned quickly and pressed her flushed and lovely face against the bars. "What was that you just said, McConachie?"

"I, uh — I said, lieutenant, that I've got to clean up that *damn cell a bit*." He hurried off before she had a chance to think it over.

ADOLPH KLAUSE WAS A PATHETIC LITTLE MAN IN HIS MIDDLE forties, with a thin, disjointed body that appeared to have been haphazardly stuck together from a set of scaled-up tinker toys. A

wedge of black hair curled over his forehead in the manner of his given-namesake of WWII fame, but there was no Charlie Chaplin mustache to complete the illusion. He was huddled at the far end of the bottom bunk, hugging his knobby knees to his chest, and looking no more like a mass murderer than a priest at a picnic.

The lieutenant was the first to speak. "Adolph Klause?"

The alleged killer looked up vacantly. His eyes were tar black, small and close together. Bird-like, Mark thought. When the prisoner failed to answer, the lieutenant said again, "Klause? Is that your name? Adolph Klause?"

"Yes," after a dark pause.

"It is my understanding, Mr. Klause, that early this morning you dictated, then signed, a confession. That you did, in fact, admit to the murders of three women. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Was it done voluntarily, Mr. Klause? On your part, I mean."

"Yes."

"You were not coerced in any way?"

"No."

"Threatened?"

"No."

The little man had thus far moved only his eyes. His monosyllabic answers had emerged tonelessly from between thin, unbending lips.

"You made a statement, Mr. Klause, at the time of your arrest —"

Klause sat up abruptly. "*I was not arrested!*" he shouted wildly, his body taut with emotion.

"But —"

"You listen to me, damn it. I — was — not — arrested. Understand? I turned myself in. *I was not arrested.*" His agitation was acute and volatile, almost maniacal. It was also short lived. After a time, he said, "Anyway, who in Hell wants to know?"

The lieutenant moved with deliberation to the center of the cell. "I'm Lieutenant Carruthers," she told him with quiet dignity. She flashed her badge. "This is my partner, Sergeant Swanson."

"I'm supposed to be impressed?" Klause curled his upper lip disdainfully while his eyes scouted up and down her remarkable body as though she were standing there stark naked. "Lady cop, huh? Well, far as I'm concerned, you're no better'n the rest of them sluts." He ogled her with utter contempt. "I know about your kind. Oh, I seen you coming down the Tier just now, bouncin' along, jigglin' and

wigglin' your fancy ass, and all them guys locked up in their cells, just ahootin' and ahollerin' to get out at you — ”

“*That is enough.*” The lieutenant cut him short as Mark moved quickly to her side. After a protracted pause, she said with quiet authority, “Now, suppose you tell me *why* you turned yourself in.”

Klause hesitated. He was breathing heavily. “Because I was told to,” he said tersely, “that’s why.”

“You were *told to?*”

“You deaf or something, lady? That’s what I said, wasn’t it? I was *told to.*”

“By whom?”

Klause faced her defiantly, with an I’m-beyond-your-reach-now, born-again smirk on his pallid face. “*By God,*” he intoned with righteous finality.

The lieutenant moved closer. “Well, now,” she said, her voice gentle, confiding. “And did God also tell you to commit murder?”

“For a fact, yes.”

“And pricing your victim’s denuded bodies at \$1.49 apiece, Mr. Klause, was that God’s idea, too?”

Klause’s face darkened as though suddenly shadowed by an inner cloud. The whites of his eyes widened in angry circles around their shiny black irises, and his thin lips parted into a moist, ugly red slit, like an open wound. He was visibly trembling.

“That’s all they were bloody worth,” he spat out, “and a bad bargain at that.” The man struggled awkwardly to his feet. His eyes now, like luminous black agates, were rolling in their sockets. “They sold their bodies and their souls into iniquity, and they were paid the going price.” He snickered evilly. “Don’t you read your Bible, lady? Eh? ‘Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, *I will repay.*’”

The lieutenant glanced apathetically at Mark. “This guy’s about three bricks short of a full load,” she told him quietly. “You might as well call McConachie.”

“Aren’t you going to ask him if he committed that fourth murder?”

“What’s the use? He’d only blame it on God.”

“I guess.” Mark sighed reflectively. “Sounds like a new twist to that old *the Devil made me do it* routine, *a la* Flip Wilson.”

The lieutenant chuckled as she turned her back on the wild-eyed Klause to join Mark at the barred front of the cell. It was an unthinking move, and one that she was to immediately regret.

MARK'S FIRST INKLING OF TROUBLE WAS WHEN HIS BEAUTIFUL partner's familiar chuckle suddenly ended in a grim grunt of surprise. He spun around, his big fists clenched instinctively. What he saw brought a startled gasp to his own lips.

The lieutenant was struggling to retain her balance from the unexpected jolt of Adolph Klause's gangly little body that had now, somehow, glued itself to her back. His black head was buried in her long golden hair, and his arms and legs were wound around her bountiful anatomy like the tentacles of a tinker-toy octopus. His skinny fingers raked at the white front of her blouse, and as Mark began to move toward them, the white was being slowly clawed apart to reveal a widening wedge of pink lace and satin, and even pinker flesh.

"Damn it, Mark! Get this loony off me."

The lieutenant was doing her utmost to dislodge him. She shook and shimmied with all the repugnance of a dog getting out of an unwanted bath. But she was in the unhappy dilemma of trying to remove the offending hands, and legs, and feet, while striving, at the same time, to preserve some measure of modesty. It was not to be.

Mark ducked behind them (for which the lieutenant appeared momentarily grateful), and with one hand planted firmly between her shoulder blades, the other circling Klause's scrawny neck, he skinned the man away from her as though he was peeling a banana. Unfortunately (for the lieutenant), Klause's fingers had anchored themselves single-mindedly in the tattered folds of her shirt-blouse, and the garment was inadvertently peeled away with the reluctant loony.

Some minutes later, when Lieutenant Carruthers, Mark and McConachie walked the noisy gauntlet back through the cell block to the entrance foyer, the lieutenant was wearing Mark's tent of a jacket, and a flustered look of steamy discomposure. Mark, in his shirt-sleeves, was close behind her, with his rugged features creased in an idiotic smile of sweet retrospection. McConachie brought up the rear, scratching his hoary old brain-box and debating with himself whether to be governed by appearances, and demand his usual fee, or to try for a little extra on the strength of a *menage a trois*.

IT WAS WELL PAST THE LUNCH HOUR WHEN LIEUTENANT Carruthers stalked self-reliantly into the squad room and headed for

her glass-partitioned office. She wore a change of blouse over the same snug gray skirt, and Mark's discarded suit-coat was draped over one arm. As she passed Mark at his desk, she said, "I'd like a word with you," and tossed him his jacket without breaking stride. Mark fought back an involuntary grin as he shrugged into the garment, then followed her into the office.

"I suppose I should say 'thank you' for the loan of that damn jacket," she said as she faced him with an air of cool chagrin.

Mark kicked the door shut and dumped his burly carcass into a convenient chair. "The pleasure was all mine," he told her amiably, "but why do I get the feeling that you're not all that appreciative?"

Cathy Carruthers glared across the desk at him. "And why do I get the feeling that you deliberately made a Hollywood bloody production out of getting that damn jacket off of you and on to me?" Her vivid blue eyes sparked angrily. "And, Mark, was it really necessary to help me on with it like that?"

"Lieutenant," Mark said, adopting his well-rehearsed little-boy look of injured innocence, "any true gentleman would have done the same."

"From the front?"

Mark smiled wistfully. "I guess I just got carried away," he said, and then with unexpected warmth and tenderness, he added, "You were beautiful." He met her stormy eyes with his own and held them for some memorable moments. "Besides, it isn't every day I get to see you blush."

As though to prove him wrong (and much to her own annoyance), Cathy Carruthers promptly blushed again. And she was not quite able to repress an embarrassed, reluctant little smile. "Damn it, Mark," she said with a show of demure temper, "whatever am I going to do with you?"

A SUDDEN RAP ON THE DOOR PRECLUDED THE NEED TO DO anything with him at all, at least at that particular moment, and the lieutenant seemed to exude an abrupt sense of relief as the door swung in, and an officer of somewhat abbreviated stature appeared in the bottom half of the opening.

"Lieutenant — are you available?"

"Come in, corporal."

Corporal Garfield Leprohn (the *Leprechaun*, as he was known to all and sundry in the department), was perhaps the littlest person this

side of Frabble Rock ever to aspire to legitimate cop-hood. And, as Mark was uncommonly fond of pointing out, it had not been easy for the little guy.

"How would *you* like to go parading through life on a pair of tiddly stilts?" Mark would ask facetiously of anyone willing to listen, "to have to bob and weave among your fellow-men like a truncated flag at half-mast, or to be doomed," he would persist, "to traipse about in a four-foot world fraught with eye-high doorknobs, belt buckles and belly-buttons, of every disgusting size and contour. How would you like that, Bucko? Hmm?"

The Leprechaun, however, had not been daunted by any such shortcomings (so to speak), real or imagined. He had simply made the most of what little God had given him, and with great dedication and purpose, had managed over the years, to elevate himself (in a manner of speaking) up through the ranks to the lofty position of head of the Records Department, where he was (and is, to this day) duly accorded the reluctant respect and friendly ridicule for which he had so diligently labored.

"Well, if it isn't Gargantua the Great," Mark said with an acute lack of enthusiasm.

"How did you make out?" the lieutenant asked the little man.

"Great." The Leprechaun echoed Mark with a sly smirk. "What else?" To the lieutenant, he said, "I've got the information you asked for, and I must say, your suppositions were uncannily accurate."

"Then the girl in the Lipshitz murder was *not* a prostitute?"

"She was not. And as you surmised, there *are* people in her background. Several, in fact."

"She was married?"

"Well, no. But she was shacked-up."

Mark let loose a noisy sigh of exasperation. "Would someone like to clue *me* in?"

"At your age," the Leprechaun replied smugly, "that would not be an easy task. However, with your permission, lieutenant, I would like to summarize my findings before handing over the file."

The lieutenant made the little man's day with a nod and a bewitching smile. "You have the floor, Garfield."

THE LEPRECHAUN TOOK A COUPLE OF SWIPES WITH HIS handkerchief at the seat of a vacant chair before elevating his tiny tush into position. He balanced his briefcase on his little lap and began to

sort through a horde of file folders. He rejected one file after the other with an exasperated shake of his little head until he apparently found the one he wanted. Then, as he began to rifle through the files contents, Mark suddenly exploded.

"Oh, for Chrissake!" he blurted out. "Get on with it, you bloody little fidget!"

If looks could have killed, Mark would have been dead and buried, then and there, without the benefit of clergy. In lieu of that unlikely fate, however, he merely groaned and sank a little lower in his chair. The Leprechaun squared his tiny shoulders, cleared his throat importantly, and began his dissertation.

"In the first three deaths," he stated evenly, "the victims were found to be prostitutes. They had no known relatives; and no acquaintances to speak of, other than a disgruntled pimp, a few johns, and a co-hooker or two. Consequently, their deaths were dead-ends. Literally."

"Yes, yes — we're all aware of that, Corporal," the lieutenant said impatiently. "Let's get to the fourth one, shall we?"

The Leprechaun did not enjoy being rushed. "Well — " he drawled, protracting the word out in typical Jack Benny style, "the girl you found in the Lipshitz window this morning, was one Shelley Newcomb, a twenty-three year-old female Caucasian of Anglo descent. At the time of her death, she was living common-law with a Max Wineghart, an unemployed high-steel worker. A violent man, Wineghart. Neighbors have reported hearing loud and bitter quarrels on several occasions and from which Miss Newcomb had subsequently emerged with visible scars of battle."

"Hmm. He sounds like a lovely fellow, I must say, and an equally unlovely suspect." The lieutenant looked pensive. "But if he was not employed, corporal, how were the two of them able to subsist?"

"She worked, lieutenant. As a bar girl in an East End nightclub. *The Playpen*, on South Slater Street. That's the place where the bar girls and waitresses all dress up like little girls, and the waiters and bartenders like little boys. You'd have to see it to believe it. Short, high-waisted dresses for the girls, complete with hair ribbons and knee socks; and short pants and little porkpie caps for the guys. They look like a bunch of erotic children."

"Erotic?"

"With a capital E, lieutenant. When I said the dresses and the pants were short, I meant short." The Leprechaun demonstrated by

drawing a little hand high across his lap.

"Sick, sick, sick," Mark muttered. "So why haven't we closed them down?"

"Because," the Leprechaun put in, "the place is legit. And so are the girls. There's no law against dressing up, you know, and a 'no-fraternizing-with-the-customers' rule appears to be strictly adhered to. There are just a bunch of adults acting as if they had never left kindergarten."

"Who runs the place?"

"The club is owned and operated by a forty-one year-old pubescent who calls himself Tommy Flowers. Can you believe it? And he's married to a thirty-nine year-old nymphet named Thelma. She's the club's hostess."

"What was the reaction of these people to Miss Newcomb's rather bizarre demise?"

"Shock and sorrow, lieutenant. At least, that is what they professed. I did the interview, personally, and they seemed genuine enough. They said Shelley Newcomb was supposed to work last night but she didn't show. They hadn't seen her since her last shift Saturday night, which would have extended, of course, into early Sunday morning."

"What time does she normally go on shift?"

"10 P.M. The club operates from 10 until 4 A.M., every day except Sunday."

"I want the address of that club, corporal, as well as the names of all Shelley Newcomb's known friends and workmates."

"It's all in the file, lieutenant. But I can tell you right now, there's only one other couple who were more than just casual acquaintances. Melissa and Wilson Gibbs. They live in the same apartment block, and Melissa also works at The Playpen. She's a waitress, and just turned nineteen. Her husband (legally, this time), is a longshoreman when he's working, which isn't often."

"Did you get a Medical Report from Sam Morton?"

"No, lieutenant. I checked, but it wasn't quite ready. I was planning on a trip to the morgue when I left here."

"Don't bother, corporal. We'll check it out." The lieutenant slipped a short caballero jacket over her white blouse as she stood up. "Mark, sign out the Chevy and I'll meet you in the garage in five."

"Where're we going? To The Playpen?"

"No. I doubt there'd be anyone around this time of day. We'll hit The Playpen later tonight, when it's in full swing. In the meantime, I

think we'll pay 'just-plain-Sam's' a visit. There are a couple of questions I'd like answers to."

"Such as?"

"Such as what caused Miss Newcomb's death, for one."

"And for another?"

"Whether to hit you for the price of a new blouse and bra, to replace those you and your demented accomplice so brutally tore from my body this morning, or, to settle for a medium-rare with prawns at the local Sizzler?"

Mark chuckled. "I'm game either way," he said. Then, wistfully, he added, "In fact, it will be an *udder* delight."

"I THINK YOU SHOCKED OUR LITTLE IRISH ELF," MARK SAID as he swung the Chevy into the parking lot of the Metro Central City Morgue. "He's probably still sitting in your office, with his mouth and those ridiculous files hanging open, wondering what really did happen this morning."

The lieutenant grinned. "You didn't help the situation much with that 'udder delight' bit," she reminded him. "In fact, that crack was enough to make a poor girl cower."

Mark groaned. "Did you enjoy the steak?"

"Yes, I did. Thank you."

"And the prawns?"

"Mmmm. Those, too."

"I don't suppose you'd care to try for the, uh — 10-ouncer with lobster?"

The lieutenant gave him a dark look of reproach as she got out of the car. "You might as well wait for me here," she said. Then, as though in afterthought, she added, "With luck, nobody will notice you doing it."

"Huh? Doing what?"

"Dreaming the impossible dream," she said, and she blithely walked away.

Mark watched her go with mixed emotions. Coming or going, she was great to watch. "Two down, and two to go," he mused aloud. Where Mark came from, "impossible" just took a little longer.

IT WAS THIRTEEN MINUTES OF MIDNIGHT WHEN THE GRAY, unmarked Chevy ghosted past the front entrance to The Playpen, in Metro's nefarious East End. Mark was behind the wheel, his beauti-

ful partner poised like a jungle predator on the seat beside him. He could see her face in the wan light of the dashboard, intense, alert.

"Want me to park it, lieutenant?"

"No. Not yet." She chewed reflectively on her lower lip. "Why don't we just circle the block. And, Mark, keep it slow."

The car seemed to move of its own will, noiselessly, down the darkened street. As they crept around the second corner, the lieutenant said, "Ah-ha," with a note of grim satisfaction, "just as I thought." She pointed ahead to a storefront that looked somehow familiar, even by streetlight. But there was no graffiti now to befoul the window, and as they drew abreast of it, Mark could clearly read the gold block-lettering:

**HYMIE LIPSHITZ
KOSHER MEATS**

"Hey, how about that?" Mark exclaimed. "I knew the Lipshitz store and The Playpen were in the same area, but I had no idea they were this close. They could even be backed up on one another."

"They could at that, Mark. So why don't we take the alley now, and find out."

The soft purr of the idling motor took on a hollow echo as they nosed into the narrow alley. The lieutenant counted aloud as each back entrance drifted slowly by, lining them up with the storefronts she had monitored moments before, but it proved to be an unnecessary precaution. But The Playpen and the Lipshitz premises were clearly marked for rear deliveries and, as Mark had suspected, they were, in fact, back to back. Only the width of the dark alley separated the bare, low-wattage bulbs that glowed dimly above the deserted doors on either side. Mark braked the car to a halt between them.

"What now?" he said, looking from one bleak and silent portal to the other.

The lieutenant did not answer. Her attention was rivetted on the double back-doors of the Lipshitz store, the same doors that only last night had been forcibly entered by Shelley Newcomb's killer.

"A common length of two-by-four," she said absently to Mark, "jammed into steel brackets on the inside of those doors, has served to ensure the sanctity of Hymie's shop for twenty years. But last night, with relative ease, some knowing miscreant gained access to the premises by simply severing the wooden bar. A sharp saw could have done it in seconds."

"We know it did happen," Mark said impatiently, "but *why?*"

The lieutenant shrugged. "To rid himself of a dead body, I suppose, which was probably the only tangible evidence of his invidious carnage."

"Yes, but why all the dramatics, lieutenant? The hook, and that \$1.49-Day hoax?"

"I would guess that was done on the spur of the moment, in an attempt, perhaps, to divert the direction of the investigation that was sure to follow. If you recall, Mark, at the time the hoax was perpetrated, not even we knew the \$1.49-Day killer had already given himself up."

"Bad timing," Mark suggested. "And he almost got away with it."

"I hardly think so," the lieutenant replied. "It just seems inevitable, in these last minute cover-ups, that they are rarely executed well. This one is no exception."

As she spoke, the lieutenant swung her eyes and her attention across the alley to the rear of The Playpen. There was something strangely forbidding about it. A single, blank door hugged one corner. It had neither hasp, nor knob, which gave it access only from the inside. Then, centered between the door and the other corner, a small barred and bricked-up window (or what once had been a window), added to the atmosphere of a very unfriendly and almost impregnable fortress.

"Okay," the lieutenant said, "I've seen enough. Now let's see what the joint looks like on the inside."

"Do we flash our badges?" Mark asked routinely as he eased the car ahead, "or do we go incognito?"

"Incognito?" The lieutenant laughed lightly. "Are you kidding? If you went in there wearing nothing but a diaper, Mark, you'd be spotted for a cop before you got one flat foot in the door."

"Not if I took along my rubber ducky."

"Besides," the lieutenant told him, "we have no way of knowing what disguise would be most appropriate until we get in there, and by then it will be too late." She took her .38 Special from her red-leather handbag and spun the cylinder. "You better check your piece, just in case."

Mark looked puzzled. "you expect trouble?"

"Who knows?" The lieutenant was staring at Mark in that vague and obscure way that usually suggested some deep, inner cogitation. "Let's just say that I've got a kind of wild theory about this whole

set-up. And if I'm right, we might be in for a bit of a wing-ding."

"You must have picked up some kind of a clue at the morgue," Mark speculated.

"No, as a matter of fact, I drew a dismal blank with Sam. The unfortunate Miss Newcomb simply bled to death from a severed jugular, and that is it. We do know, however, that she was impaled on the hook after she was dead, *and*, after she had given up her quota of fourteen precious pints. But *where* she died, *why* she died, and *who killed her*, well — that's still the current conundrum."

MARK AND THE LIEUTENANT WERE GREETED WARMLY AT the entrance to The Playpen by what appeared to be, a big boy. A very big boy.

"Hi, guys!"

The detectives heard, and saw, but they could only stand there, gaping, rooted in momentary disbelief. Confronting them, was a smiling, boyish face, a thatch of tousled, sun-bleached hair, and a tiny, white, porkpie cap. The face, hair and cap were attached to a body that could only have been spawned on Muscle Beach, but which now bulged obscenely under a dainty white shirt with a frilled bib-front, long sleeves and lacy cuffs. And further down, embarrassingly mature loins had been shamelessly sheathed in tight tom-boy shorts that seemed to end before they began at the height of long, heavily muscled thighs. Finally, at floor level, white ankle socks and matching white sneakers provided a fitting footnote to "big-boy" and his bizarre ensemble.

Mark fought back an incipient smile for fear that it might be misinterpreted. But they were made welcome, regardless, with an animated "Well, come o-o-o-on in," and a knowing, boyish grin that had "I'm-one-Are-you-one-too?" written all over it. Cathy Carruthers reached instinctively for Mark's arm as she allowed herself to be herded in over the threshold.

"He looks like the man from bloody Glad, in a bib and a jock strap," Mark said in a loud whisper to his beautiful cohort, as they followed little Lord Fauntleroy's bobbing buns across the entrance foyer and down a short corridor.

The lieutenant chuckled. "Aren't you glad now that we decided not to dress for the occasion?"

"I'll tell you later," Mark demured, "when I see what the girls are wearing."

A door was opened, and they were suddenly assailed by sounds of soft music, the tinkle of ice-cubes on crystal and a murmur of voices. And they were led, like Alice through the looking-glass, into what appeared to be a small, but conventional nightclub, with bar, dance floor (the size of a go-go pedestal) and a stage. A dozen or so tables, half of them already occupied, were scattered about the dimly lit room, and a small group at the rear of the stage were immortalizing the old favorite, *Blue Moon*. Big-boy left them then, but they were not alone for long.

"Hi, kids!"

An extremely well-endowed little girl (or was it a petite young lady?) came skipping up to them with a smile and a happy giggle. "My name is Thelma," she said, "what's yours?"

Thelma looked to be all legs and auburn curls. The little-girl dress she wore, with its high, ruffled waist and flared skirt, though modest enough as far as it went, ended without adequate warning the width of a widow's wish short of propriety. On a child, it would have been cute. On Thelma Flowers, it was blatantly sexual.

Cathy Carruthers flashed her badge and identified herself. "My partner," she added, with a nod toward Mark, "is Sergeant Swanson." The little-girl facade and the smile seemed to melt away as the lieutenant spoke, and Thelma Flowers was suddenly left looking her age. "Well, what do you want with us?" she said impatiently.

"One of your girls was murdered last night, Mrs. Flowers, and we're trying to find out why."

"We've already told the police everything we know," she retorted angrily. "Shelley Newcomb only worked here, lieutenant. Surely you don't intend to hold us responsible for the private lives of all our employees."

"You don't feel then, that her death was related in any way to her job? An irate, or over-zealous customer, perhaps? A fellow worker?"

"No. Of course not. What a wild idea."

"Then you won't mind, I'm sure, if the sergeant and I sort of, look around a bit."

"Look around?" She did not appear to be too pleased with the prospect.

The lieutenant smiled disarmingly. "It's just routine, Mrs. Flowers. After all," she said, softening her voice to a husky, confiding whisper, "we're just doing our job, you know. And, uh — it isn't every day that Mark and I get to visit a — well, a club like The Playpen." She lowered

her eyes and shyly reached for Mark's hand. "By the way," she said coyly, "we think your little dress is just *darling*, don't we, Mark?"

Mark nodded numbly. "Yeah — uh, just darling," he echoed.

Thelma's happy girlish demeanor was slow to reassert itself, and there was a residue of caution in her voice as she struggled to qualify them in this new role. After a thoughtful pause, she said, "Well — uncertainly, then with a slow smile and a tiny titter of comprehension, she added, "I guess even cops can have their little, uh — preferences." She gave them both another long, lingering look of appraisal. "Grab a table," she said finally, "and I'll tell my husband you're here."

As she flounced away, Mark was quick to notice that the ribbon in her hair matched the pink, frilly hem of her peek-a-boo panties.

THEY CHOSE A TABLE WHERE THEY HAD A GOOD VIEW OF the exits and the other patrons, though it was difficult to see much of anything in the subdued light. As they took their seats, the lieutenant's eyes were drawn to a balding, nondescript sort of man, fiftyish, in a dark, expensive-looking suit and (oddly, given the lack of light) a pair of shaded Foster Grants. He had risen from a nearby table and was headed (rather purposefully, she thought) toward the rear of the club. When he disappeared under a small, illuminated sign that said "Gents," she shrugged and turned her attention back to the table.

Mark, meanwhile, was making himself comfortable. The lieutenant watched him patiently, her beautiful golden head resting on one hand, as he hitched up his chair, edging it closer to hers, then closer, until, when he turned to look at her, her luminous blue eyes were only inches from his own. "That," she said quietly, "is close enough. And, Mark — "

"Uh-huh?" She was so close, he could feel the soft warmth of her breath.

"Let's try to remember, shall we, that we're here on a serious police matter."

"I'm poised for action."

She sighed tolerantly. "Well, whatever action you're poised for, tiger, I won't be far behind. *You are still holding my hand.*"

"Good grief!" He looked aghast. "And all this time I thought that *you* were holding *mine*." He made a move to withdraw his hand, just as another girl came skipping toward them, and he felt his partner's fingers tighten again, firmly over his.

"Saved by the 'belle,'" he chuckled.

The lieutenant groaned.

"My name is Melissa," the girl said brightly. "Can I get you something?"

She was a small person, a possible five feet at most, and she couldn't have weighed more than ninety-seven pounds soaking wet. In her kiddies attire, hair-do, and in the dim light of the club, she looked to be about twelve years old. That is, until she had taken their order, then stopped to clear and wipe off an adjacent table.

Mark coughed self-consciously, then surprised even himself by averting his eyes.

"That 'child,' Mark, must be Melissa Gibbs," the lieutenant asserted, "Shelley's friend. She certainly doesn't look her age."

"How old is she?"

"According to the Leprechaun, nineteen."

"Jeeez-uz!" Mark squirmed in his chair. "This place is beginning to make me feel downright dirty."

"Thank God for that." The lieutenant rewarded him with a tight smile. "But, Mark, have you noticed that almost all the customers are men? There must be thirty people here, and only three of them are women."

"And we," Mark noted, "are the only couple."

"So I see." The lieutenant pursed her lips in thought. "Maybe we've been putting on the wrong act."

"There's a first time for everything," Mark reminded her, "but, lieutenant, why the charade at all?"

"I'm just trying to throw them off guard, Mark, give them something else to think about. When we get around to looking this place over, I want it to be on my terms."

The drinks arrived then, in a swirling tease of skimpy skirt and skivvies. "Johnny on the rocks for the gent," the girl tittered, "and creme de menthe for the lady."

"Are you Melissa Gibbs?" the lieutenant asked.

She looked surprised. "Yes, I am."

"I'm Lieutenant Carruthers, Mrs. Gibbs. This is my partner, Sergeant Swanson. We're from Metro Central."

"Oh." She lowered her voice. "You're here about Shelley, aren't you?"

"Yes. Is there anything more you can tell us that you haven't already told the police?"

The girl bit her lip and darted a nervous glance over the lieutenant's shoulder. Her manner quickly changed. "I don't know what you mean," she said.

"The entire staff, lieutenant, has been questioned already, and at great length." It was a male voice, and it came from behind her. The lieutenant turned to see another man-child smiling down at her. "You may go now, Melissa," the man said authoritatively.

The girl hurried away with her saucy little tail wagging provocatively. The man lowered himself into a chair. "I'm Tommy Flowers," he said. "May I join you?"

"It seems you already have," Mark observed dryly.

Tommy Flowers smiled good-naturedly. He was not a big man, but he exuded an air of strength and purpose that even the "little-boy-blue" outfit he was wearing could not dispel. The illusion of youth, however, that radiated from his forty year-old face, had obviously been accomplished with the subtle help of make-up.

"I understand from Thelma," he said with a meaningful glance at their coupled hands, "that you're sort of mixing business with pleasure tonight."

The lieutenant stole a quick look at Mark before lowering her lovely eyes. "I guess we are being a bit obvious, aren't we?" She bit her lip, then shyly withdrew her hand. "It must be the atmosphere of this place."

"The Playpen does have its effect on people," Flowers said proudly. "It seems to bring out ones', uh — hidden proclivities."

The look of bewildered innocence that the lieutenant leveled at Tommy Flowers would have suckered a saint into the life of a born-again sinner. "Mr. Flowers, we really do have to make a guided tour," she told him sweetly. "But then, that would get the 'business' part of the evening out of our hair, so to speak." She shook her golden head indicatively. "Wouldn't it?"

Flowers smiled. "Sure. Give me a minute with our musicians, and I'll take you around myself."

While the club owner engaged the small group on the stage in conversation, the lieutenant said to Mark, "A guy in a dark suit and tinted shades disappeared under that 'Gents' sign, Mark, when we first arrived."

"So?"

"So he hasn't come out yet. Don't you think it's a bit strange?"

"Did anyone follow him in?"

"Well, yes. Three or four other men have gone in there, but they've all since returned to their seats."

Flowers had left the stage and was threading his way slowly back to them, smiling and nodding at the clientele along the way.

"You stay here, Mark, while I take the tour, alone."

"Do you think that's wise?"

She shrugged out of her jacket without answering, then as the man approached, she rose to meet him. Flowers made no attempt to hide his admiration. "I'll bet you'd be something else in a Shirley Temple outfit," he said as he led her away.

Mark watched them go with a feeling of helpless chagrin. "The bloody pervert must have read my mind," he muttered to himself.

TOMMY FLOWERS WAS DOING HIS BEST TO PLEASE AND impress. Perhaps the prospect of adding a new playmate to the fetishistic regulars at The Playpen had temporarily turned his head. Especially one as exquisitely unique as this starry-eyed lieutenant, who drew mewls and drools (not the least, his own) from staff and patrons alike. Nor was he unmindful of what a "sympathetic ear" in the ranks of the police, could do for him and the club, if, eventually, she could be persuaded to function in the club's interest; to remain openly sequestered, as it were (in the manner of Poe's purloined letter) while continuing to merge and mingle with the legal lackeys at the Eleventh Precinct. And in her off hours, well —

The "tour" had begun with a slow meander back through the maze of tables, and The Playpen's motley customers had taken advantage of the occasion, fawning, clutching, as they welcomed the six-foot, honey-haired *ingenue* to their collective breasts. Next had come the open ogling and the heavy breathing of the group of spaced-out virtuosos that occupied the stage.

"Way to go, big mama."

"Oh, yeah, foxy — far out."

"He-e-e-e-e-ey!"

They were well into *I'm In The Mood For Love* when the introductions began, and though only half the band appeared to be playing at any one time, the melody (such as it was) never seemed to falter.

It was off to the bar next, where the lieutenant met a couple of over-aged, under-dressed "kids," one male, one female, who were busy building drinks and bumping bottoms in the narrow confines behind the counter. And then on to the kitchen, where a tall, good-

looking black man in a microcosm of steam and stainless steel, greeted them with a broad friendly smile. He wore a chef's hat at a jaunty angle and a long white apron, which, by The Playpen standards, made him look a little over-dressed — until he unexpectedly turned his back.

"Leroy is strictly gourmet," Flowers said as they turned to leave. "His specialty is *Beef Bourguignon*."

The lieutenant arched her perfect brows in innocent wonder. "Not buns?"

They went from the kitchen to a small room off a rear center-hall that seemed, almost, to evenly divide the rear half of the premises.

"Let me guess," the lieutenant said as they entered, "this would be your private office."

"Office, yes," Flowers replied with an ambivalent laugh, "but rarely private. We're all one big family here."

"*I'll bet*, she thought, as she surveyed the room's interior. A desk and a filing cabinet were crammed against one wall, while the rest of the room was given over to a bar, a sink, a fridge, and a well-worn black leather couch. It was all too typical, the lieutenant decided. The entire place, in fact, was somehow just too blatantly obvious. Too pat. Too — expected.

Even the "change-rooms," where they headed next, fitted into this tiresome malaise of over-done sexuality; a *menage* of mirrors and make-up, in an absurd repertory of puerile, juvenescent clothing, where the staff and an in-group of regulars would come to don their panties and pinafores for an evening of charade.

But it was not until they had reached the tail-end of the tour, and were standing in a kind of receiving area at the rear of the building, that the lieutenant was suddenly rewarded with what she liked to call the "unexpected," and which, as usual, was precisely where (and what) one would least expect it to be.

The room was utilitarian and bare, except for stacked boxes of incoming liquor and food, and the usual pile of refuse and crated empties, destined for the dump. She recognized the blank back door she had seen from the alley, locked and barred on this side, and the bricked-up window, close against the opposite wall. The drab austerity of the place gave it the appearance and the appeal of a sealed crypt.

But there *it was*. The tell-tale crack in The Playpen's impregnable armor. The very thing she'd been looking for. The *unexpected*. And to the trained eye of the Amazon, it was as obvious and apocalyptic as a pimp on a pulpit.

WHEN THE LIEUTENANT REJOINED MARK AT THE TABLE, A girl in a Shirley Temple wig (and little else), was performing the last rites on *The Good Ship Lolly-Pop* from the front of the stage.

"Must be amateur night," the lieutenant said with a grimace as she sat down.

"Yeah. She's kind of cute."

"Are you serious? I've heard axles needing grease sound better than that."

"I'm looking," Mark told her, "not listening. Where's your boyfriend?"

"He'll be back any minute. Did you spot the guy with the shades?"

"Not a sign of him."

"Ah-ha." The lieutenant looked like the mouse with the cheese. "Then he *is* in there."

"What?" Mark stared at her vacantly. "Who's in where?"

"Mark, I'm absolutely convinced that there's a secret room, or something, built into this place. It runs from behind the restrooms, over there, clear back to the alley. And what's more, our mysterious Foster Grant did not go to *the john*, Mark, he *is one*."

"Prostitution?"

"Of the most abominable kind. You'd better check out that men's room, *pronto*. And, Mark, look for hidden or blank doors, or anything else unusual. *Anything* that might suggest an entry into that area. I'll give you exactly one minute to reappear."

"Better make it two, lieutenant. Even *I'm* not that good."

The lieutenant smiled. "Two, then. If you're not out in two, I'll put in a call for a back-up and come looking."

"You're really that sure there's something going on back there?"

"I'm really that sure."

Mark levered himself out of his chair and headed directly for the "Gents" sign at the rear of the club. Cathy Carruthers glanced at her watch. She was sipping her creme de menthe, moments later, when Tommy Flowers suddenly appeared at her elbow.

"Are you still working on your first drink?" he asked as he sat down, uninvited.

"I'm on duty, remember?"

"You *were* on duty." Flowers caught Melissa's eye from where she was serving drinks at another table. He made a circular sign with his index finger. "Drinks for everyone," he told the lieutenant. "It's time

you let your hair down. Thelma tells me she's been looking through our costumes and she's come up with something special, just for you."

"Oh?"

"Wait'll you see it."

"I'll wait."

"Little Bo-Peep," he said excitedly.

Cathy Carruthers looked appropriately sheepish. "Knowing you," she said, "I'll bet there'll be more peep than bo."

"Yeah," he breathed.

Melissa bore down on them then, with another round of drinks, and the lieutenant rose nonchalantly to her feet. "I've got a telephone call to make," she said with a casual glance at her watch. "I'll only be a minute."

"Reporting in?" he asked with some wariness.

"Not really." She treated him to one of her mind-boggling smiles. "I just don't want anyone waiting up for me."

His answering smile lingered long after she was gone; even, some minutes later, when he saw her leave the phone at the end of the bar and head toward the restrooms. But then, as she went right by the door marked "Ladies," and abruptly disappeared into the men's room, the smile became a puzzling frown.

"That blonde bitch," Thelma Flowers whispered venomously into her husband's ear, "has more on her bloody mind, me thinks, than a tumble with my Tommy."

The club owner shrugged her hand impatiently from his shoulder. "We'd better see just what in hell she's up to," he said grimly.

"LIEUTENANT? QUICK! HELP ME WITH THIS THING." CATHY Carruthers read the scene in a split second. The guy with the Foster Grant's was out cold in the middle of the men's room floor. His shattered shades hung from one ear and a trickle of blood oozed from a slack, open mouth. Mark was farther back, with one of his size-twelves braced firmly against the end of a row of urinals, and his big fists wrapped around the open edge of a solid blank door. The door, unopened (without hasp or hinges), would have been an unobtrusive part of the wall. Mark was in the midst of what appeared to be a losing struggle to keep it from closing.

The lieutenant moved with lightning speed. She stooped and grabbed the inert man on the floor, then tossed him like a sack of California Whites into the space between the door and the jamb. "That

should hold them both for a while," she said to Mark. "What's making it close?"

Mark straightened with a puff of relief. "It must be operated pneumatically," he gasped. "So what do we do now?"

"Find the mechanism, I guess, and blow it away with a .38." But before she could transform the words into action, the door behind them slammed open and Tommy Flowers burst into the room. His ludicrously leggy wife was hard on his heels. "You get the guy," the woman blurted from the doorway, "I'll take care of Bo-Peep."

Mark turned to face the advancing Flowers with a tolerant sigh. "Time for bye-byes," he sang with a lilt, as he lobbed a long, lazy right into the club owner's unprotected face. The man seemed to stop and stiffen in mid-stride, and Mark stood back to watch the "flower" wilt (as he recalled it later) — "like a pansy in a pot."

Thelma Flowers had come charging by her woebegone mate with her feet and fists flailing, right into the waiting, open arms of her smiling opponent. The look on the woman's face, as their bodies collided, was one of angry frustration, then, as the Amazon linked her hands and began slowly to squeeze, the anger turned to mild alarm. Panic promptly followed, and the one-sided encounter soon came to a pitiful end in a wild-eyed, lung-wrenching, desperate struggle for air.

"You'll have to teach me how to do that," Mark said as he took the breathless, gasping woman from the lieutenant's arms, and set her down on one of the toilets to recoup. "We could practice over at my place — "

"Hi, guys!"

They both turned to see Big-boy standing in the open doorway, his round boyish face wreathed in a malicious grin. The huge muscular body seemed to fill the door opening, and one clenched fist held a wine bottle firmly by its neck. Mark had taken a tentative step toward the man when a throaty, dark voice from behind, made him freeze in his tracks.

"Hold it right there."

The lieutenant shot a quick glance over her shoulder. "Well," she said brightly, as though welcoming an unexpected guest to a Sunday outing, "if it isn't our old friend, Buns."

The pneumatic door had somehow released its hold on the wedge of flesh and bone that had prevented it from closing, and now, on the threshold, stood the tall, good-looking black from the kitchen. He was still wearing the chef's hat and apron, and he held a gun in his big right

hand.

The lieutenant squinted at him through narrowed eyes. "You're not planning on turning your back on me again, are you, Buns?"

The big black exposed a perfect set of pearly whites. "No way, big mama, not this time."

"Then I don't suppose you'd object," she said as she tossed her golden mane defiantly and reached for the hem of her gray skirt, "if I turn mine." To Mark, in a guarded whisper, she said, "You take Fauntleroy."

Then, in one aesthetic motion that would have made a ballerina blanche with envy, the Amazon hiked her skirt to a somewhat unseemly height, pivoting as it lifted, until the white's of the chef's eyes were an indentical match to the pristine gleam of his teeth. And at that precise moment, she leveled a devastating donkey kick at the hand that held the gun. The weapon went whistling up into a far corner of the room.

And, while there was still more surprise than injury in evidence, the Amazon turned, skirts flying, and lunged with a vicious karate jab to the black man's throat. She struck again, then again, with an eye-blurring combination to the left temple. The man dropped to his knees with a rasping gurgle, then toppled forward onto his face.

Mark's view of his partner's somewhat saucy shenanigans, fortunately), was only peripheral. Big-boy, on the otherhand, witnessed the entire spectacle from an eye-to-thigh vantage point that was not a little difficult to ignore. And it was in that split second of heady inadvertence, that Mark hurled himself at his assailant.

The lieutenant was in the process of turning, smoothing her disheveled skirt, when she saw Mark land with both big feet on Big-boy's bulging thighs. His hands streaked out and clamped themselves around the hulking faggot's neck, and for the briefest moment, the two men were staring into each other's eyes, inches apart. But the big detective's six-foot frame was already answering the call of gravity, falling back, and down, and it was dragging Big-boy along for the ride. When his shoulders hit the floor, Mark straightened his long legs with a vengeance and sent the other man hurtling high over his head. A long, trailing shriek of rage came to an abrupt end with a squishy *thud!* And when Mark scrambled up to investigate, he found Big-boy crammed snugly, butt first, into one of the urinals. And he was there to stay.

Oddly, the bottle of wine was still intact, clutched in Big-boy's big

right fist. He was gazing up at the two detectives with a stupid, vacant grin on his face.

"The big jerk's halfway to dreamland," the lieutenant laughed.

"Yeah." Mark relieved the man of the bottle, ruffled the thatch of sun-bleached hair, said, "Nighty-night," with apparent solicitude, and flushed the urinal.

THE SECRET BACK ROOM AT THE PLAYPEN WAS, IN EFFECT, A self-contained apartment. It was long and narrow, with most of the space taken up by four small cubicles that apparently functioned jointly as bedrooms and detention cells. There was also a bed-sitting room and a kitchenette cramped into the far end of the place, complete with T.V., telephone, and a good supply of food and booze. A bathroom, only slightly larger than the facilities it contained, divided one area from the other.

Mark and the lieutenant stood close together in the kitchenette area, watching the specialized teams from H.Q. go over the place with a fine comb. There was barely room to swing a cat, and with all the uniforms milling about, even standing room was at a premium.

"So you figure it was Flowers who killed Shelley Newcomb," Mark said summarily.

"No doubt about it." The lieutenant was filing an asymmetrical fingernail with care. "Now all we've got to do is prove it."

"Which may not be easy."

"Oh, I don't know, Mark. Both Big-boy and Buns have already begun to sing like a couple of Carolina crickets. And in the process of saving her own skin, you can bet that Thelma Flowers will soon be picking up the chorus."

"Maybe so, lieutenant, but there's still a lot of missing pieces. Damn it, we don't even know *where* the murder happened, and *why*."

"My guess is that she was murdered in the changeroom, Mark, while getting dressed to go on shift, Monday night. That would be consistent with the M.E.'s T.O.D. estimate, plus the fact that she was nude, or near nude, when the killer struck. And with all the blood that flew, it shouldn't be too difficult for the lab-crew to nail down the exact site of the murder."

"And the motive?"

"We may never know for sure, Mark, but I'd be willing to bet that Shelley Newcomb inadvertently (or otherwise) discovered this hidden room, and what it was being used for. In my humble, but considered

opinion, she was simply being silenced."

"Salami'd, is more like it," Mark said grimly.

The lieutenant cast a thoughtful eye at the closed door to one of the cubicles. It had remained closed since they had first broken in through the men's room, and discovered a young girl huddled in a corner in a state of wild-eyed hysteria.

"There's a policewoman in there with her now," the lieutenant said with a rueful sigh. "Poor kid. Her last visitor must have been that creep with the Foster Grant's. There should be a special kind of justice for an animal like that."

"Lieutenant?"

A uniformed policewoman had just entered the room. She had Melissa Gibbs in tow. "This, uh — person, lieutenant, wants to talk to you. She says it's important." The startling contrast between the child-like Melissa and the policewoman would have been comical under happier circumstances.

The lieutenant acceded with a smile. "Very well," she said, "what is it, Melissa?"

The girl looked uncomfortably around at the people milling about them. "I just want you to know," she said haltingly, "that I intend to do everything I can to — to cooperate."

"As a witness, you mean? For the State?"

"Yes, lieutenant."

"Are you saying that you were actually involved with what was going on in here, Melissa?"

The young waitress paled and her lips quivered. She looked to be on the verge of tears. "Yes, but — I mean, it wasn't what you think — "

The lieutenant put her arm around the distraught girl and steered her over to the bed-settee, then sat down with her. "Why don't you tell me about it," she said gently.

Melissa told her story with frequent pauses for tears and self-recriminations, but that did not dilute, in any way, the impact of what she had to say.

Thelma and Tommy Flowers, she informed them, were the principals involved. They were the brains of the operation. Big-boy and Buns were only muscle. If there were others, she did not know of them.

The Playpen, she explained, was being used as a kind of way station, or pick-up point, for an organized ring of flesh peddlers. Runaways and street-kids, mainly, who seemed to be the most vulnerable and the least likely to be missed.

They were only kept at The Playpen for a few days, Melissa went on, then they were shipped out. To the Middle-East, mostly, Big-boy had told her once. Some to the Orient. Very few of them were kept State-side. There was big money involved, he had said. Oil money.

When asked where *she* fitted in, Melissa told them with some embarrassment, that when young girls were in short supply, Flowers would sometimes give her extra money to pose as one of the runaways. You know, for a customer. The regulars at the club knew her, of course, but many of Flowers' special customers were from out of town. "They never knew the difference," she said with an indifferent shrug of her tiny eyebrows.

The lieutenant sighed audibly through tightly pursed lips. "And Shelley?" she asked ruefully. "What happened to her?"

"I honestly don't know, lieutenant. It happened Monday, when I was off. Maybe they were short of girls that night, and Shelley, well — refused — "

"I get the picture," the lieutenant interjected. "Once she'd been *asked*, once she *knew* about that back room, a refusal to play ball could only have meant one thing — "

"Golly." Melissa's eyes widened incomprehendingly in her childish face. "It seems such a silly thing to — to die for. I mean, it's not like Shelley was even — "

"A virgin?" the lieutenant suggested dryly. "Perhaps not. But then, maybe she wasn't a whore, either."

"WELL, I GUESS THAT PRETTY WELL WRAPS IT UP," MARK said as he and the lieutenant left the entrance to The Playpen and sauntered slowly down the street toward the gray Chevy. It was almost dawn. "It's the F.B.I.'s baby now. But who'd of thought The Playpen would turn out to be a front for a gang of lousy flesh peddlers?"

The lieutenant chuckled. "And who'd of thought the real \$1.49-Day killer, Adolph Klause, was actually telling the truth, all the time?"

"Yeah," Mark said thoughtfully. "It's been some kind of case. But there's still a couple of things I'm not too clear on, lieutenant."

"The graffiti on Hymie Lipshitz's window?"

"Uh, yeah — " Mark gave his beautiful partner a doubtful glance. After all, that was not part of the \$1.49-Day killer's established M.O."

"No, it wasn't. My guess is, it was done by vandals. It had nothing to do with the murder. A simple coincidence, Mark. Nothing more."

"Coincidences aren't supposed to happen in murder cases, lieu-

tenant."

"Nor are beautiful blondes supposed to be anything but dumb." She chuckled coyly. "And certainly not, uh — clairvoyant."

Mark emitted a hopeless groan. "Okay, Swami, so how did you spot it?"

"The secret room?"

"What else?"

"Well, Mark, the 'unexpected' was that bricked-in window at the rear of the club. When we first saw it from the alley, you may recall, it was *centered* between the door and the opposite wall. But when I saw it again from the inside, either the wall or the window had mysteriously moved. The fact was, of course, that the inside wall was a phony, and, I might add, about as stupidly obvious as those little one-liners you're so pathetically fond of."

"I'm pathetically fond of a lot of things, lieutenant, not the least of which is to get some practice on that bare-hug thing you were doing tonight."

The lieutenant gave him a sly look. "I can read you like a book," she said. "That's *bear*-hug, Mark, not *bare*-hug."

"As Tommy Flowers would say, lieutenant, everyone to their own, uh — hidden proclivities." He stuck out his tongue and panted. "Anyhow, I bet my way'd be more fun." ●

Hi!

I'm Lucy Hamilton,
and I get Mike Shayne
every month.

Do you?



Kelvey looked at the gun. It was a .32 caliber Smith and Wesson, and it came with a dozen bullets. He had confidence that it would do the job!

The One And Only

by MORRIS HERSHMAN

FORD KELVEY WAS LET OUT OF PRISON A LITTLE LESS THAN five years after he was sent in. Three hours after hopping the train at Ossining, he was back in New York City where he belonged.

The West Village had changed, turning dull and middle-class. A buddy from the old days did show up at a bar Kelvey had known when somebody else ran it. Right away, of course, he asked about Abe Singer. Honest Abie, as the little Jew was known, had bought into a

good business. Kelvey knew bitterly where the money had come from. Not one of the guys who used to buddy up with him saw Abie these days. In fact, somebody else had let Kelvey's informant know about Abe having moved away and got married.

Kelvey found Abe's name in the phone book, with a small b after it for business location. A girl at the other end told him sunnily that Mr. Singer would be back from a working trip on Friday and could see him in the morning.

"He'd better see me," Kelvey said thinly. "You make sure an' tell him that."

"What was the message again?" the girl asked, maybe on account of not being used to somebody who talked so plainly.

Ford Kelvey was too angry to repeat it. It was strange how he never had any dealings with Abie Singer that didn't involve him or Singer not getting things straight.

It wasn't that long ago that Kelvey had asked Abe for a favor to drive a borrowed car half a dozen blocks and wait for him a few minutes. Singer hadn't figured that a bank robbery was on his acquaintance's schedule. He certainly couldn't have expected to hear shots and see a wounded Kelvey limping out to the car, let alone the chase that had followed.

Even as Kelvey settled back in the car, he remembered, his mind was working fast. "Take this bag and scoot," he snapped. "You'll give me what's in there some other time."

"Every penny," Abe Singer had promised fervently. "One way or another you'll get every penny back."

Although Kelvey was in pain and could guess what his immediate future was going to be like, he didn't hesitate to trust Abe Singer. The little Jew's uprightness was a watchword among those gamblers with whom he hung out and whose life-style had fascinated him.

Until now, it seemed.

"This is the last time I ever let myself get mixed up with somebody like you," Singer said, reaching for the black bag because it wasn't any part of his nature to let somebody down. "From now on, I only make friends with Yeshiva men and rabbis, so help me! Word of honor."

"Never mind the yapping!"

"But you'll get this money somehow."

A police car could be heard racing up the avenue.

Honest Abie, as people called him, the briefcase under an arm,

rushed to the end of the alley. Only once did he look back, then he walked out like a businessman on the way to some big meeting. Most likely he was too scared to do any more of the rushing his insides were crying out for him to do. Well, the guy had two legs in decent condition and he could move 'em!

Kelvey forced himself to get behind the driver's seat. He was trying to stanch the blood from his left calf when the police car swerved into the mouth of the alley.

ONE PREVIOUS ARREST SOME FIFTEEN YEARS BACK WAS enough to make Kelvey remember what was likely to happen next. A sergeant named Paxton put him over the jumps after his wound had been treated. Over and over Kelvey repeated that he didn't know zitz about any bank money and that he wanted a lawyer.

He found himself being represented by a beefy guy named Callahan, who notified him quietly that a friend was paying the fee in secret to make sure Kelvey got the best possible representation. Kelvey knew perfectly well who that friend was. With anybody but Honest Abie he'd have figured that the payout was insurance to keep an arrested bank robber from telling who else had been in the car with him. Abie, though, had a head that worked along lines Kelvey could never anticipate. Even a former friend had to be helped out, by Abie if there wasn't anybody else to raise a hand.

It wasn't hard to guess where Abie had gotten the money. Kelvey could've done without that. Better to have the stuff waiting for him on the outside. Abie was different, that was all.

The trial was short, and didn't get much publicity because a city scandal was taking up a lot of space in the New York papers. Callahan did an okay job, but was busting his head against a wall and Kelvey knew it. The jury came in with its verdict after only five minutes, and Kelvey thought he was lucky to draw easy numbers like seven to ten, with two down for good behavior.

He kept to himself for those first grim months at Ossining, not making friends or even getting mixed up in the secret gambling games. Honest Abie sent money once a month through a mutual friend. It came in useful to buy some things, but he'd rather have had the loot when he was sprung. He tried to get that message through, but Abie must have thought the other guy was lying for some reason. The dough kept coming. Again Kelvey wasn't seeing eye to eye with

the Jew.

But Kelvey couldn't keep to himself for the next few years. Listening to prisoners — to *other* prisoners — meant hearing that they considered everybody outside as having done them dirt. He supposed he was being influenced, after awhile. Spending the money from Abe on a secret high-stake game was the tipoff that he had changed.

In hardly any time he was starting to think about himself as another victim, somebody who had been put upon. Abie Singer must be living off the fat of the land with money Kelvey had given him and was suffering for. Every once in a while he'd break his heart to send a few bucks in, that Jew who was making a dandy profit while Ford Kelvey did time, his waist getting thicker, his eyes more hollow, his face white and then gray. It didn't need much more talk from the others for him to decide that when he got re-planted out of this place, the damned Jew would give him every remaining nickel of that stolen money plus interest! One way or another, as Honest Abie himself had said, the guy was going to pay for that freedom — through his Jewish nose if necessary.

Ford Kelvey would make sure about that.

ABE SINGER, LIKE KELVEY HIMSELF, HAD GOT THICKER IN the waist and his features were fuller. He was dressed in fine threads, though, a two-piece "gun-check" suit with matching vest, a cotton shirt and silk club tie.

"You can see I worked hard." He waved a hand at the busy outer office. "And I've been lucky, with the help of the *Rabbaynu shol oyloom*."

"I don't understand that chicken talk." Kelvey looked stonily at the window with Abe's name in gold flake, and the words Real Estate Broker. "You've had five good years with my money."

Singer's face was flushing. "I bought into this business with it, yes, and made enough to buy out my partner. As for the amount of my stake, I returned it anonymously and with interest to the bank as soon as possible. What I gave you was extra and out of my own pocket."

"I told you to give me back the dough later on," Kelvey snapped. "Anything else you did cuts no ice with me."

He couldn't help being sore. Never had he heard of anybody giving back money to the bank it had been stolen from! Thanks to that little Jew, his prison term had been for nothing — if he accepted what he

was being told. For enough money, Honest Abie could probably lie his head off, too. Just like everybody else.

"And you think I owe you everything in that briefcase except the money I sent you?" Singer asked.

"I know it, Abe, and I'm here to get just that."

Singer considered. "I could probably quote you from the Torah until you-know-where freezes over, but you'd never change your mind."

"Not about the green stuff I wouldn't!"

"I've already paid out much more than you gave me to hold for you, and it's beyond me that you have any real right to consider yourself the owner. All the same, that money was very useful to me. Without it, I wouldn't be in this business or married or have one child and another on the way, God willing."

"Okay, so you owe me."

"Not only is money very tight these days, but this whole thing is a problem in ethics, in common decency. I have to ask advice what to do."

"Advice from who?"

"From my rabbi, from, probably, other wise and holy men. From the local *amorayeem*, the jurists, so to speak."

"You'd tell some strangers what happened?"

"I wouldn't mention your name, should that prospect upset you."

"Well, if you want to hand yourself over on a plate, that's up to you."

"These men are my friends and advisers," Singer whispered.

"Just the same, Abie, I can't wait longer for the rest of that money."

"Not even one extra day? Give me twenty-four hours to — no, make it on Sunday morning. Tomorrow is the *shabb-* — it would take too long to explain. Leave your phone number and I'll be in touch on Sunday morning."

"You'd better be in touch," Kelvey said carefully, making himself clear as possible. "And you'd better pay up what's coming to me. I don't want to make threats, but if I do I'll carry out every one of 'em should you force me into that."

"I'll do what's right."

"You've got two days, Jew-boy, and don't you forget it!"

He walked out of there, favoring his left leg, and went back to his hotel. It was the same place on Eighteenth Street where he had lived more than a dozen years ago, and privacy was certain. The prices had gone up out of all knowledge or sense in the meantime, but a similar

complaint held good for just about everything in the city to which he had returned.

TWENTY MINUTES AFTER HE WOKE UP ON SUNDAY MORNING, Kelvey's phone rang. Abe Singer was on the other end.

"Be in my office tomorrow morning at eleven," Singer said.

"You don't have to tell me that, Abie. One way or the other I'll be there."

Singer was dressed more quietly this time, and his cheeks looked a little sunken. Taking the visitor's chair confidently, Kelvey didn't feel a bit surprised that the Jew had chosen to pay up instead of facing violence.

"I have been advised to pay you enough so that the use of the money will have cost me double in penalties," Singer said quietly.

"How much is that?"

A briefcase was passed across to him. Inside Kelvey found eight thousand dollars in used and unmarked small bills. Kelvey had hoped for more, but after Singer's previous expenses this amount seemed just about on the nose.

"I've also been advised to tell you that this is all you're getting," Singer added. "The gravy train stops right here."

"We can worry about that some other time, Abie."

He zipped the case shut. In this cheerful mood he didn't give a solitary damn about what might happen next year. He wouldn't be bothered to understand how intensely Abie was talking and that as a result probably every word was serious. The loot he had earned and suffered for, that loot or what was left of it, was now in his hands.

SPENDING MONEY IN THE BIG APPLE HAD NEVER BEEN MUCH of a problem for Kelvey. With a stake like his, it was only a matter of some short time before he had taken up with an expensive good-looker who kept an office humming by day and kept Kelvey humming at night. He didn't deny himself any goods he wanted. Hadn't he put in time upstate for this? Well, he was going to get the best of everything while even a penny of his stake lasted.

By December he was on the phone to Abe Singer again. This time he didn't get through till he'd just about promised to tear the receptionist apart otherwise.

"I need a loan," he said without any introduction when Singer came on.

"A loan that'll never get paid back, huh?" Singer said, and added flatly, "Sorry, but I'm not a finance company."

"Then I'm going to sing real pretty to the cops, Abie. Don't tell me you want your wife and kid to see their old man in jail."

"*You'd* be there for sure," the Jew said spiritedly. "Besides, I'm not guilty of anything at all in this matter."

"I'll be in to see you for that next eight thousand, Jew-boy, and you'd better have it."

"If you come up here again," Abe Singer began, and Kelvey broke the connection with a laugh just after the Jew solemnly promised to have a private eye on duty at his office.

Kelvey didn't take the threat seriously. No private op would risk his life to do any job, and Kelvey was going to make sure a possible death threat was plain and might be put into action against client and peeper.

It meant buying a gun and bullets. The only dealers he knew from the old days were in the can themselves or had gone to Florida or Arizona for the winter warmth. One of his few remaining old-time friends put Kelvey through to a young guy of not more than twenty and known as Geezer, for some reason. Maybe the word for an old man meant something different these days. A hell of a lot of other things had changed!

Once it was clear to Geezer that Ford Kelvey didn't want to buy a broad, a bag or a deck, negotiations went ahead smoothly.

"Give me two hours," Geezer said. They were at a small table in the bar called Freddy's. "Meet you right here."

Geezer was five minutes better than his word, coming back with a blue steel .32 S & W long and a dozen bullets.

"This doesn't look like it could make much of a hole," Kelvey grumbled in vague hopes of driving the price down.

"Are you puttin' me on, man? This baby would make a hole a truck could drive through."

Kelvey nodded as if it made for a decisive answer. The price would leave him with no more than a hundred dollars and the urgent need for money. Enough to make Abe Singer's life miserable, for sure.

By the time he got back to his hotel with the merchandise, night had fallen. He'd have gone directly to the Jew's home and scared the life out of the man's family, but wanted to save that as a further threat in case of need. Not that he expected the least difficulty. A Jew was likely to know what self-interest called for. Singer could swear angrily to hire all the private dicks in the world and actually do it, but when

push came to shove he'd want to play it safe.

KELVEY SPENT A QUIET NIGHT IN FRONT OF THE TELEVISION set watching a hockey game on some cable channel. Sleep was never a problem for him and he got up refreshed in the morning. He put on the dark suit they'd handed him at Ossining, and added a checkered cap he had bought since coming out. Satisfied that the combination made him look dangerous to Singer and any private detective who might come around, Kelvey added a coat and set out at last.

A breakfast stop took only fifteen minutes. By nine-thirty he got busy walking. The time it took him was enough for Singer definitely to be at his desk. This being Friday, he'd want to quit early for the Jewish Sabbath, so he'd probably come in early as well.

Another decision Kelvey had made was to stand for no nonsense whatever. Let him bull his way through, cutting some private richard down to size, and Singer wouldn't hesitate now or the next time Kelvey made a request for money. Or the time after that and so on.

By half-past ten he was in the Thirties, the neighborhood of Singer's office building. He found the right one easily.

Singer's outer office was crowded, two staff women back of a railing and visitors on chairs at this side. A perky young secretary smiled up at him.

"I have an appointment with Singer."

"And your name, please?"

He gave it.

The girl put through a brief call. Her face was more composed when she looked back. "I'm afraid you'll have to wait your turn, sir."

"The hell I will!" He walked to the quartersized swinging door which would let him into the other part of the room and to Singer's office door down at the far end.

One of the visitors called, "Hey, mister, we've all got to wait."

Kelvey whirled around. Two women were sitting with snarly brats, and there was a bearded man in his forties. This man wore a skullcap and a suit darker than Kelvey's. Probably one of those synagogue buddies of Abe Singer's, and hoping to get a good deal on account of the connection.

"Did you say something?"

"No, I did not," the man replied in a faintly Europe-accented English. His voice was deeper than that of the man who had just spoken. "My name is Joseph Einhorn, and — "

Kelvey had already looked away to the last chair in the office. It was taken by a young man in the late twenties, a young man whose cobalt blue eyes were meeting his.

"You wanted something, bo?"

"Just to remind you that everybody has to wait for Mr. Singer."

"I don't. If you want to make something out of that, just say the word."

He sensed he must be facing the private eye that Singer had told him would be on the job.

The man said, "I'm not willing to fight about it, if that's what you mean."

"Then there's something else." He drew out his gun. The women gasped. Mr. Joseph Einhorn's lips were pulled down disapprovingly, but that was all, as Kelvey saw from the corner of an eye. As for the private peeper, he winced as if this was his first time in front of a revolver.

"Come on, you, march in front of me."

"But I — "

"You won't get hurt if you do like I say. Get up and march in front of me to Singer's office."

He had decided on hustling the p.i. in there so that the Jew could see for himself the hired man hadn't been of the least use.

The young private peeper stood slowly, hands raised without his having to be told. Kelvey took several steps back, allowing the young man to walk in front of him and keep a safe distance.

"Okay, now get a move on."

The secretary was watching, awe-struck. One of the children suddenly let out a squall of fear. Kelvey gestured him forward.

Singer's office door opened on a woman and child who walked at the owner's side. Singer suddenly looked out and over the office. His eyes came to the young man, then moved to Kelvey back of him.

Maliciously, Ford Kelvey raised his gun. "How'd you like a dose of this, Abie?"

He'd been intending to frighten the Jew and nothing more, but didn't get any further. Back of him, the flat of a hand suddenly cracked at his neck, forcing him to gasp and turn. The gun was useless. A fist crashed against his right cheek, twisting his neck again and knocking out at least one tooth while sending him down to the floor.

A foot was on his gun hand, remaining there and exerting hellish

pressure till he let go of the weapon. Then he was raised by the lapel. The attacker was bringing up a fist and one sure haymaker to the jaw. In the split second before it landed, Kelvey managed to get one anguished look at the man's face. He damn well knew that he must have misunderstood Honest Abie once more, and this had been the most important time of all. Just the same his eyes opened wide in disbelief

"YOU COULDN'T A DONE THAT BETTER IF YOU'D BEEN ONE OF those private detectives on television," the sergeant said to the bearded Jew. He had been assigned to take care of this emergency call.

Joseph Einhorn smiled. "I am not a private detective by any means, sergeant. In Europe I was nothing more than a *boolvon*, a bully. This job I took on because Mr. Singer is an important person at the synagogue and was in the right when he dealt with this man. What's more, Mr. Singer asked for help."

Kelvey, hands cuffed back of him and a uniformed policeman watchfully at his side, was dazed and furious. He certainly knew he'd been shafted. Singer had sworn to have a p.i. on the premises — it was hard to remember exactly what term the guy had used, but that'd been his point beyond the least doubt — and instead this big Jewish ox had been the one to look out for. How in hell could Ford Kelvey have known it beforehand?

"Well," the sergeant said to Mr. Einhorn, noticing the skullcap at last, "you did a great job, Rabbi."

"I'm not a rabbi, either," Einhorn smiled. "I am a functionary at my synagogue, yes, but I have only the job of making sure there's no disorder during services and that all ceremonies proceed smoothly."

"Sort of a policeman yourself, in a way, without a badge." The sergeant frowned in thought. "What you mean is that you're like a sexton."

"Perfectly correct, sergeant. In Hebrew and Yiddish, I am called a *shamus* . . . what's the matter with him?"

"Quit kicking around like that, you, or I'll settle you down good," the sergeant warned. "Come on, you're going back to jail till you can be sent upstate again for violation of parole and a few other goodies I'll be glad to think of. You've got a long trip ahead." ●

It was a morbid prank perpetrated in a graveyard — and there was only one way to deal with it!

Teddy Roosevelt and the Great Adventure

by CONRAD WESSELHOEFT

LATE IN AUGUST, GEORGE MACCROSTIE CAME INTO MY office at the high school, a haggard young man with a story to tell. I was busy preparing notes for the first teachers' conference of the year when I saw him, and immediately stopped work. It had been a couple of years since I'd last seen MacCrostie. He looked lousy for a guy who'd once been called "Mr. Touchdown," "a teenage rebel," and "a writer with a future."

Ignoring a query from my secretary, MacCrostie pushed through the glass doorway of my interior office.

"How you doing, Mr. Turbeville?" he said. In the two years since he'd graduated, MacCrostie hadn't lost his flip, street-wise style of speech. But at least he wasn't still calling me "Gus."

By his looks MacCrostie probably hadn't changed his clothes in several days and his face and hair seemed damp with fever. His blue eyes were extraordinarily vivid.

"May I talk to you about something?" he said. His tone told me it was important, at least to him.

"Sure, George," I said, gesturing to a chair.

"Paul Reid — you heard what happened? — it's about him."

I nodded.

Reid, a Columbia University student whose family I'd known for years and one of the most promising young men ever to graduate from Locust Valley High School, had been killed the previous month when he had stepped into a stream of fast-moving traffic in the Oyster Bay area. Witnesses reported he had seemed "dazed" or "absent-minded" moments before the tragedy. I was surprised when the medical examiner's report showed he had been under the influence of neither drugs nor alcohol at the time. Reid had been buried in his father's home town of Burlington, Vermont. Though a large delegation of faculty and students attended the funeral, I had not been part of it.

"You may remember we were pretty good friends," MacCrostie said.

"I remember," I said.

"He used to say he liked me because I read books," MacCrostie continued. "Not like he did though. It wasn't too cool to be seen reading — not in your school; so he'd read in bed, you know. His favorite books were biography — the lives of great men. He'd wolf down three-quarters of a book a night, then finish it off at the breakfast table. Never have I known a guy who knew so much about Lincoln, Churchill, Teddy Roosevelt . . .

"Also used to say he liked me because I made him laugh. I've always been the class clown type."

I smiled. Among students, MacCrostie's antics and practical jokes were already becoming obscured in a legendary mist. As principal, however, I had never found him funny.

"Is there something about Paul Reid you want to tell me, George?" I asked in a conciliatory tone.

"Yes," he snapped. "In my own time, in my own way."

I saw that MacCrostie had not yet learned to control his temper.

"All right," I said, meeting his hard stare with one of my own.

MacCrostie stood and closed the door to my office.

"Please tell your secretary to hold your calls," he said.

I obliged, then turned an analytical eye on this peculiar young man whom I had never really liked.

MACCROSTIE WAS STRONGLY-BUILT AND SWARTHY. IN HIGH
school, he had typically worn a maximum of faded denim, an India-cotton shirt and, to gain attention, some sort of Apache Indian beaded choker. He was now either twenty or twenty-one, fully six feet tall and

about 170 pounds. Indeed, his description had been well-known to police officers between Greenvale and Oyster Bay throughout his rampaging teen years. Though he had been a superb high school athlete — a halfback on the football team and a wrestling star — he had been suspended from school once or twice for possession of marijuana. Moreover, MacCrostie had frequently been cited for speeding and driving while under the influence. Yet, despite these infractions, he had done brilliantly his final two years in school. His teachers generally attributed his scholastic achievements, particularly in writing, to his near-worshipful attachment to Paul Reid.

After graduating, MacCrostie and Reid had headed for Europe. I'm told they got no farther than Britain, where Reid immersed himself in history — tramping alone to places like Kennilworth and Warwick castles, while MacCrostie focussed his attention mainly on movies and plays in London. When they returned, MacCrostie had published a cynical op-ed piece in a Long Island newspaper about the destructive influence of American culture in England. He had slightly atoned for himself in my mind by following this with a hilarious parody of American tourists called "London Down on the Fat Farm." The two articles had brought some attention to MacCrostie and helped to spoil him. It was said by those who really don't count — mothers and friends — that he would be a fine journalist some day. But I'll wager MacCrostie's own mother had no opinion in the matter. She was an actress, perennially out of work, and rumored to be an alcoholic. MacCrostie's father simply didn't exist.

I CAN'T JUST LEAVE IT AT THAT. NOT WITH ANNA. AS A YOUNG man I had foolishly become involved with her. It was quite easy; she had been . . . lustrous, and emotional in a way that made me feel like a great and wise protector. But these qualities had attracted other men. When she became pregnant with George she denied it had been the same with the others, begged me to believe her. This was my escape cue. Naturally, I had a career to think of. Finally, in a terrible despair, she had turned on me, writing, "He will never, never grow up to be like you."

I add this — why? — I don't really know. It used to trouble me greatly. But so much time has passed. And, again, there had been so many men on the fringes of her life. How could I know?

Reid, obviously, had been cut from a very different bolt. His father was a Unitarian minister of great energy who was forever enlisting me in fund-raising activities. His mother, a Norwegian beauty, taught

philosophy at Long Island University.

Reid was the all-American type: tall, wiry, blond; liked to fish, laugh, go to movies; liked girls a lot and seemed to treat them well. He had been a National Merit Scholar and had scored perfectly in the verbal half of his SATs. Several teachers had approached me over the years to criticize me for showing a distinct favoritism for Reid. I'm guilty as charged. I just liked him better than the others. He had something special. What's wrong with that?

Good intelligence was perhaps what attracted the boys to each other in high school. Each quelled the intellectual loneliness of the other, I believe. But in MacCrostie I suspected there was something more. He perhaps saw in Reid a joy of life and sense of security he had never known at home.

"It really tore me up when Paul got killed," MacCrostie said quietly, though dramatically. "I really cared about the man. It's safe to say I loved the man. He was so promising, you know, so bright . . ."

"George," I said gently, "why are you here?"

MacCrostie reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a folded envelope.

"He wrote this the day he was killed," he said.

I took the letter. It was postmarked July 15, '82, Oyster Bay, N.Y. The sender had written his name — Paul Andrew Reid — across the back. The letter was addressed to George MacCrostie.

"Has anyone else seen this — like the police?" I asked.

"No, I didn't think people would know how to take it. You had to know Paul."

"I'm curious," I said. "Why do you come to me?"

MacCrostie dropped his eyes and sighed deeply. As he did so, his tough pretense fell away. He seemed to speak, not through the false integuments of his character, but from the heart.

"I've been living with this thing for weeks. I needed to tell someone. So I came back to the school, where we both had roots . . . Would you read it, please?"

I opened the letter and began to read.

Dear George,

I write this in a bird sanctuary (of all places) several hundred yards from the graveyard where Theodore Roosevelt is buried.

Roughly a mile from here is Sagamore Hill, Roosevelt's old home, now a museum. As you

know, I've been there many times, but never until today have I been to the graveyard where Theodore is buried.

I'm sure I mentioned Sagamore Hill to you during one of our many discourses on history. It's a colossal house, forever rambling, stuffed with books, rifles, hunting trophies, flags, children's toys — the physical reflection of a man of action, appetite and intellect.

From our travels in Britain you know I love places like this. They set me dreaming; they give me restful pause from a confused and crazy world.

I think you might be interested in knowing what happened today, in what I've just seen.

I spent a couple of hours wandering through the house and exploring the grounds, then, late this morning, left Sagamore Hill for Oyster Bay. Seeing the road sign to Roosevelt's grave, I decided to stop and pay my respects. I've intended to do this on many occasions, as I think I may have mentioned to you.

I followed a concrete path through the old cemetery, then climbed the stairs to the grave. It was modest for a president, enclosed by a black, cage-like fence, blanketed with ivy. Outside the fence was a boulder with a quote from Roosevelt: "Keep your eyes on the stars and keep your feet on the ground." What an idealist!

By now, George, you know why I am writing and that all I've said so far is prelude. I think I know what's going on. But the sort of scary thing is I'm not absolutely sure.

Suppose what I saw no more than an hour ago indicates I have either hallucinated badly (there have been no drugs in months) or have had my first so-called "religious experience." I'm not religious, but if a God were at work today, it was not a kind one. But what I'm thinking is that it was the devil. You ask, how

can a devout atheist like me attribute anything to the devil when he can't to God?

Of course the odds are against it, but maybe, just maybe, what I saw today was the work of some metaphysical force — God or Devil — that I can't explain or understand. All this has started me thinking . . .

I took the path behind Roosevelt's grave, toward what looked like a family plot — about a dozen white headstones, some decayed, the names partly illegible, others obviously newer. This was the Townsend family plot. The headstones were grouped into three rows representing different generations. Wives were buried beside husbands, children a row removed from parents.

Then I noticed a solitary, black headstone. It stood on a hillside maybe a half dozen yards from the last of the Townsend graves. Though small, it was very noticeable, probably because it was so new. The name on the stone stopped me fast. It was my own. It was my own name, George! It read:

Paul Andrew Reid
Rest in Peace

No dates. No epitaph. Funny thing, when I saw it, I began to laugh. It's like I didn't know how else to react. Then I touched the headstone and ran my fingers through the grooves that formed the letters of my name.

I lay on the grass, my head an inch or two from the stone, and felt the whole earth trembling inside me, pouring strength into me, purging me of all the tedium I have known. I stretched my arms outward and clenched my whole body and felt stronger than I have ever been, more alive.

How ironic, George. Here I was on my own grave and I had never felt more alive!

Maybe all this was a heavenly revelation and I was to interpret it as "Better become a believer or look what will happen."

Well, I'm not a believer, though I may be headed in that direction. But a threat from on high would only slow the process.

No, this whole scheme smacks not of God or Devil, but of George MacCrostie, of you, my friend.

With all my bluster about heroes like Teddy Roosevelt, you knew I, a Long Islander, would find this graveyard sooner or later. And there, behind the grave of the president himself, you buried me. I can only laugh. I shake my head in admiration of your genius.

You've got me started on something, my friend. It's the whole point of this letter. Did you know, directly before a battle, a plains Indian warrior would sometimes say: "If I'm killed today, then it doesn't matter. It's a good day to die." Can you believe that? What a great thought. To be able to wrench yourself away from all the emotionalism surrounding death; to see death, like birth, as a natural part of a great adventure. Then, knowing what is on this side, to yearn to know what is on the other.

Seeing my name on the headstone has got me yearning, George. If I were to die today, I could safely say, "It's been a good life." But things always happened a little too easily; I always got along; always made the grade; attention was always there.

I think my future would be that way, too. I see all the obstacles ahead that any man would see, but they seem easy enough to surmount. For that reason they seem uninteresting. I feel I've arrived before I've even started. What a depressing thought. As Robert Louis Stevenson was fond of saying: "To travel hopefully is a far better thing than to arrive."

I think the luckiest person in the world is he

who travels hopefully and arrives only when he's old and genuinely tired. Only then should he find his harbor and lower the sail.

I wanted you to hear my thoughts, to tell you not to worry, and to say you are my friend for life.

With love, admiration and friendship,

Paul

Post Scriptum: I'm off to run an errand in your behalf.

MACCROSTIE WAS STANDING AT MY WINDOW, HIS BACK TO me, when I finished the letter.

"Did you really plant a tombstone in that cemetery?" I asked, dismayed.

In response, MacCrostie sighed deeply, contemptuously.

"What do you think?" he replied bitterly.

Now it was the old MacCrostie speaking. When he was upset, he wanted to upset others.

"In view of your conduct in this school, I think you did," I said.

"Well bravo for old Gus," he said, clapping three times. "You've caught on for a change."

The sarcasm in his voice sickened me. God, I was tired of punks talking to me in that tone.

"Why did you do it?" I said. "Don't you know it's against the law?"

MacCrostie sighed again.

"I should never have come, man," he said. "I'd hoped you'd changed. You haven't changed at all. You don't understand me; you didn't understand Paul; I'm sure you don't lend half an ear to your students. You should never have been a principal."

I held up my hand.

"No, you wait . . ."

But I cut him off.

"Look, I don't have to take this from you MacCrostie," I said. "I know why you're here. You're looking for commisseration because you feel guilty, don't you? Thought your practical joke played some part in your best friend's death. Well, I'm beginning to think maybe it did, maybe you are partly to blame."

MacCrostie was seated on the edge of his chair. His elbows were on his knees, his face in his hands. I wondered if he was crying.

He raised his head and, instead of tears, I saw something of a smile

in his eyes.

"You know, Gus," he said, "you're a mean man. I think I identify with you because I've got some of that in me. We have that between us, don't we — that meanness eating away at our guts."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said, anxious to return to the matter of the tombstone.

"Oh, I think you do. You know exactly what I'm talking about . . . father."

There was a sign of appeal in his eyes, of let-down defenses and hope.

"Father?" I laughed. "Whoever put that in your mind?"

"You know who."

"Well let me tell you something, MacCrostie, half the men on Long Island could be your . . ."

He sprang from his chair and grabbed the lapel of my jacket.

"Don't," he screamed. His whole body was shaking, his eyes fiercely blue.

"Okay, settle down; get hold of yourself," I said firmly.

MacCrostie slowly exhaled his tension and stepped back to the window. A minute passed in silence.

"This isn't getting us anywhere, is it?" I said. Then, appealingly, I asked, "What do you think Paul meant by 'I'm going to run an errand in your behalf'?"

"That we will never know," MacCrostie said resignedly.

"Tell me," I said. "How did you know Paul would ever visit that graveyard?"

"You had to know Paul," he replied. "The guy was a maniac about history. He told me a lot of things he planned to do. One of them was make a pilgrimage to Roosevelt's grave. You know, hang around and soak it all in. I knew he'd do it; I just didn't know when."

"When did you actually place the stone in the cemetery?" I asked.

"In the fall of '80, not long after we got back from England."

"So that stone, with all its false information, has been sitting there — just a few yards from Theodore Roosevelt's grave — for almost two years?"

"Two years this October."

"And no one ever did anything about it?"

"Obviously not, man," he said venomously.

In 26 years as an educator, I had never heard of such an audacious prank. My one concern now was that the public never learn of this, nor

the Roosevelt family, several members of which still lived in the area. Over the years I'd had a few dealings with various Roosevelts, all of them amicable. I didn't want to jeopardize that rapport nor see the name of their illustrious ancestor tarnished.

"George," I said, anticipating his answer with some trepidation. "Whatever happened to that tombstone? Did you remove it?"

"No."

"Then it's still there?"

"Far as I know," he shrugged.

I exhaled a sibilant, syllable-long expletive.

"Listen, you and I are going to that cemetery right now and dig it up."

I felt if I let MacCrostie out of my sight I'd never see him again. Not that I cared to; not that I really needed him. It's just that I had this hunch he should be there. Also, the task of lugging around tombstones required a stronger back than my own.

I GRABBED A COUPLE OF SHOVELS AND THE KEYS TO THE school pick-up and we headed out to Oyster Bay. The thought of a prominent school principal in the area unearthing a tombstone was a little unsettling, particularly when I remembered there would probably be tourists nearby viewing the president's grave. I resolved if there were people in the cemetery, by God MacCrostie would work alone.

We drove in silence. It was then I began to reflect on what Reid had done. Strangely inspired by MacCrostie's joke, he had written a letter that seemed to indicate a desire to die. Within hours he was really dead, having walked into the path of a speeding car. Was it merely a coincidence he had died directly after writing the letter, or had Reid actually been suicidal? MacCrostie clearly saw it as a suicide and blamed it all on himself. All right, let him think that; let him go through life with a wretched conscience. He would get no sympathy from me. The fact is Reid wasn't the kind of guy to impose such a burden of guilt on someone. He would never have done that to MacCrostie, nor the poor driver of the vehicle that hit him. Moreover, people like Reid just don't kill themselves. Reid had only to stand still and the world would come to him. In short, I'm convinced Reid died because he forgot to look both ways. It goes no deeper.

WE SOON REACHED OYSTER BAY. ON A LATE SUMMER'S DAY such as this, the town seemed a meeting ground of two distinct worlds — the tanned, ice-cream, bikini elements creating a Coney

Island effect, while behind the tall hedgerows, on the estates of the rich, a soothing Edwardian existed.

I parked the truck in an inconspicuous location outside Youngs Cemetery. MacCrostie walked off in glum silence, leaving me to carry the shovels. It wasn't hard to diagnose from his behavior that he disliked me intensely. I was used to this from students. In any given year, there were a half dozen who glowered at me through the black eyes of their ids. But MacCrostie's contempt burned more than the others. As a ninth grader in a denim jacket with, I'm sure, a joint ever-present in his pocket, he seemed destined to lose in life. His insubordination was so great that perhaps I had wanted him to lose. Then, in his sophomore year, his classmate Paul Reid had picked him up, started him reading, philosophized endlessly with him. Soon MacCrostie was carting around books by high-brow poets and philosophers, books that Reid, but probably none of their teachers, had read.

Under Reid's wing, MacCrostie flourished academically. But his disrespect for school authorities had never abated. It was the way he'd looked at me that had goaded me. His stares had always been a mixture of defiance and disgust. I hadn't liked seeing him get so much attention, much of it just spillover from his closeness to Reid. MacCrostie was really nobody without the glittering Reid to support him.

So when Reid had died I had thought — even hoped — MacCrostie would slip back into the old high-pitched aimlessness that was the fastest track to nowhere. He would be lost without Reid to provoke his mind, guide his study, hear his soul. This is what I saw when MacCrostie had come into my office — a very vulnerable and wretched young man. From what Reid's letter had suggested, I was inclined to think MacCrostie would always hold himself responsible for his friend's inexplicable death wish.

We mounted the stairs to Roosevelt's grave and passed around to the back. Several yards off were the Townsend graves Reid had described in his letter. Beyond them was the phony grave of Reid. I stepped up to it and flung my shovel into the ground.

"Dig!" I commanded MacCrostie.

He walked slowly to the shovel, clasped it, but didn't move. His attention seemed elsewhere.

"Dig," I shouted again.

He still didn't move. His gaze was intent, his mind oblivious. Exasperated, I lurched forward and shoved him. MacCrostie stumbled to the ground, then got to his knees. His eyes were still directed away from me. I now saw his stare was fixed on a tombstone several yards

off. He slowly stood and walked toward it.

"Get back here," I screamed, with a calculated fierceness I had used for years in school corridors.

MacCrostie was now facing the small, marble stone several yards from the false grave. I saw him smile sadly and shake his head.

"I miss you so much," he said, self-absorbed.

He touched the stone, then turned and walked away.

"What about our project?" I shouted after him. "This whole damn mess was your doing. It's your responsibility to . . ."

Turning, he answered in an equally fierce tone, "You just don't know the two men that are buried there. You couldn't begin to . . ." and he searched anxiously for the word, "to fathom it all."

Saying this, he walked quickly down a steep slope of grass and was soon out of sight.

When MacCrostie had gone, I walked over to the stone that had prompted his strange behavior. I read the name and epitaph and groaned.

George Lyman MacCrostie
"Both life and death
are part of the
same
Great Adventure"
T. Roosevelt

I spent the afternoon digging up the two tombstones and transporting them to an isolated jetty on Oyster Bay. There, unnoticed, I dropped them into the sea.

AS THE WEEKS HAVE PASSED, I HAVE TRIED TO ASCERTAIN some meaning in all this. Reid's letter clearly indicates to me he was deranged. And MacCrostie's morbid prank, which may have defiled the memory of the great Theodore Roosevelt, shows he, too, was not playing with a full deck.

As an educator of some distinction, I would like to assert that the account of MacCrostie and Reid points to a cancer which is enveloping our country — a rebelliousness in young people distilled from nitro-glycerine.

I feel duty-bound to eradicate this cancerous element whenever and wherever possible.

Captain Midknight's SECRET SQUADRON



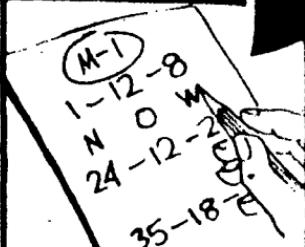
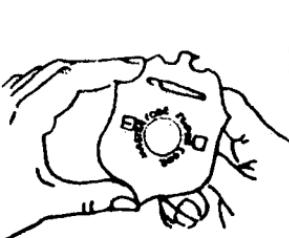
OFFICIAL SECRET CODE BOOK
AND 1941 CODE-O-GRAF

HERE'S YOUR OFFICIAL

SECRET SQUADRON MEMBERSHIP BADGE



HERE'S HOW TO USE YOUR "MYSTERY DIAL" CODE-O-GRAF!



1. Take down the numbers
— write the code key which the sender will give at the start — then write down the list of code numbers in exactly the same order they're given.

2. Set your "Mystery Dial"
— when you have written the full message, set the "Mystery Dial" for the code key that was given at the start — in this case it is master code number 1.

3. Figure out the message
— set your dial at the right code key on the back, turn the badge over — see what letters are opposite the numbers and spell out the message.

He hadn't talked, but they thought he had. He was given a warning. And then they got nasty!

Vengeance to Show in the Third

by MICHAEL BRACKEN

FRIDAY

The bullet struck Fallon O'Conner's chest, then clattered to the sidewalk at his feet. He glanced around quickly to see who'd thrown it, saw nothing unusual, then stooped to retrieve the slug before it could be kicked away by the throngs of people pushing their way around him.

Fallon held the .38 slug tightly in his small fist as he quickly limped the last few blocks to his second-floor apartment on the city's near-north side.

He'd spent the afternoon collecting his unemployment check,
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explaining to a thick-headed counselor that the job opportunities for a washed-up, heavy-drinking, ex-jockey with a limp were few and far between. And despite the counselor's rose-tinted view of the world, they wouldn't get any better even if the economy *did* turn around.

Fallon placed the .38 slug on the kitchen table next to a half-empty bottle of Jack Daniel's, unknotted his paisley tie, and pulled off his jacket. He picked up the wall phone's handset and quickly punched in seven digits.

"Jackie?" Fallon said when a thick voice answered. "One of Stern's boys gave me a message a few minutes ago."

On the other end of the line Jack Gurnsey, Fallon's former employer, swore. "You haven't been near the track in a year."

"Forty-eight weeks," Fallon said. He'd counted every one of them. "I was riding one of Stern's mounts when I fell."

Jack swore again. "The Commission's onto Stern. Somebody's accused him of fixing the races at Eastside Downs."

"It wasn't me, Jackie. I wouldn't do something that stupid."

The front door of Fallon's apartment opened and he tensed. He'd forgotten to lock the door behind him in his rush to the phone.

"Fallon?" He recognized Erin White's voice immediately.

Into the phone Fallon said, "I can't talk now, Jackie. Can I meet you someplace?"

"The Watering Hole after the last race."

Fallon replaced the handset and quickly snatched up the .38 slug. He dropped it into his pants pocket just as Erin stepped into the kitchen.

"Any luck today?" she asked. He'd met Erin at the track a year before his accident when she had been running a single two-year-old. Since then her brother had left a job with the state to help her build the business into a promising four-horse stable.

Fallon shook his head. "Always the same. How about you?"

"Admiral Eddie placed last night. Still no winners."

"Who rode?"

"Del Smith."

Fallon nodded. "He's good."

"He was holding back."

Fallon had touched a nerve and he could sense the anger behind her words. He tried to calm her even though he knew she was probably right. Erin's horses hadn't won a race yet because Gavin Stern didn't

want her horses to win. At Eastside Downs, Gavin Stern wrote the game rules. Some people played by them. Some people stopped playing.

Fallon gathered up the Jack Daniel's bottle from the butcher-block table and considered pouring himself a drink. A moment later he decided against it and poured the remains of the whiskey down the sink. It had been one thing to drink heavily when he'd looked at the future and seen only failure; it was another to drink when he'd been threatened with death and didn't know why.

Erin watched the whiskey disappear into the sink. She'd never mentioned the accident to him and had never seemed to notice the resultant limp. "Will you ride again?"

"I can't," Fallon said, slapping his left thigh. For the first time since his girth had broken in the first turn and sent him under two dozen thundering hooves, he accepted the leg for what it was, not for what it had done to his career. He might never ride professionally again, but he was ready to return to the track. "Do you have any horses in tonight's race?"

"Bobbie's running Captain Cosmic in the third. He's got Del as jockey again. I told him not to hire that little shit but Bobbie doesn't listen to me any more."

"Dinner first," Fallon said as he glanced down at his gold wrist watch. He'd held back a lot of horses on Stern's orders, and the extra cash had built up a tidy nest egg. Even when the unemployment ran out, it would be a long time before he'd have to hock the little luxuries he'd picked up. "After dinner we're going down to watch the horses."

DINNER AT SHANGHAI'S PASSED QUICKLY, AND THE ORIENTAL food settled comfortably into the pit in Fallon's stomach. They passed a lot of small talk about the track, a subject Fallon had carefully avoided during his self-imposed exile.

Soon they stood in a stall with Captain Cosmic, an unassuming black thoroughbred with a white star in the middle of his forehead and a pair of white socks on his hind legs. Captain Cosmic stood 16 hands and could win in a slow field, given the chance. Fallon had ridden the stallion in half a dozen races when Captain Cosmic had been the Whites' only horse, and had placed once and showed in three other races.

"Del's running a mare for Jack Gurnsey in the first so we won't see him for awhile," Bob White said to his sister as soon as he stepped into the stall with them. "Otherwise it looks good tonight. It's a good field, all small owners like us. Stern's not running any of his horses in the third."

Fallon knew better. Stern didn't have to be running one of his own horses to control the outcome of a race: he had the jockeys in his pocket. Fallon kept his mouth shut. If the brother and sister hadn't discovered that yet, he didn't want to be the one to shatter their naivete.

Fallon excused himself and left Erin with her stocky brother to discuss race strategy. He limped slowly down the row of stables, mentally noting how many of the horses he'd ridden and how many were new to him. At the last stall he caught a glimpse of Del Smith talking to a pair of skinny black grooms, and he stopped at the stall door.

Del looked up at him as the two grooms turned to leave and his already pale complexion turned another shade whiter. "What in the hell are you doing here?"

It wasn't the reaction Fallon had been expecting, but he concealed his surprise at the fear in the jockey's eyes. "Just looking around," Fallon said. "I haven't smelled the straw in a long time."

Del tried to brush past him. "I can't talk now."

Fallon grabbed Del's arm tightly and looked down into his eyes. Fallon had always raced at a higher weight than Del and had gained an extra ten pounds since they'd last met. For a jockey, that was a lot of extra weight to push around. He told the younger jockey, "You don't leave this stall until you answer a question."

Del looked at the hand gripping his silks. "I can't, Fallon," he said in a harsh whisper. "I can't even be seen with you."

Fallon loosened his grip. He knew fear when he met it face to face, and Del was shaking in his silks from it.

"I'm sorry," Del said as he rushed out of the stall.

Fallon nodded to a few other familiar faces as he continued his walk around the stables, noticing out of the corner of his eye that most refused to acknowledge him. Even Erin's brother had avoided speaking directly to him when he'd entered Captain Cosmic's stall. Fallon was beginning to suspect that Bob White wasn't nearly as naive as his sister.

BEFORE THE RACING BEGAN, FALLON GATHERED UP ERIN and they found a window table in the Saddle Lounge, high above the grandstands. A half a dozen tables away sat Gavin Stern, a large, burly man with a penchant for dumb blondes and dumber brunettes, surrounded by his most recent stable of two-legged fillies. Fallon exchanged thoughtful glances with Stern, then turned his attention to the races. Whatever Stern wanted done to Fallon, the Saddle Lounge didn't seem the place for it to happen.

"Who's your pick in the first?" Erin asked.

"Time's Fool going away," Fallon said. "Bloodwind and Nighththing will fight it out for place and show." To himself Fallon amended his prediction: if Del wasn't too shook up from seeing him to ride Time's Fool properly, and if the fix wasn't in.

"How about the second?" Erin asked. She was born of good Irish stock; her parents had emmigrated to the U.S. only a few years after her birth. She had wavy auburn hair tending more to the red than the brown, and a shock of freckles across the bridge of her pert nose. She was slender, attractive, and fit nicely in Fallon's arm despite her height advantage. Mostly, though, Fallon savored her winning smile: it had carried him a long way when he'd been at the worst point in his life..

Fallon scanned the racing form before he spoke. "Too many new horses," he said. "I couldn't begin to predict."

They sat and watched the track. After the first race, with Time's Fool the clear winner and an undecided photo-finish between Bloodwind and Nighththing, a pleasant young waiter brought an opened bottle of Jack Daniel's to the table.

"Compliments of Mr. Stern," the waiter said as he politely placed the bottle on the table between Fallon's cola and Erin's white wine.

Fallon glanced in Stern's direction and nodded his thanks, even though he didn't intend to pour himself a drink. Stern's face split in a wide, gap-toothed grin and Fallon thought nothing of it. Stern had bought him many bottles before and Fallon considered this one a farewell toast; they both knew what the bullet in Fallon's pocket meant.

Captain Cosmic showed in the third with Del astride the stallion, and Fallon could tell, even at this distance, that Del had been holding the horse back. It was one of those things only another jockey who'd ridden

the horse could be sure of.

THE BALANCE OF THE EVENING WAS UNEVENTFUL AND when Fallon left the track late that night with the bottle of Jack Daniel's tucked into his jacket pocket, he convinced Erin to head home with her brother. As much as Fallon wanted her to return to his apartment with him, he still had an appointment to attend to.

Jack Gurnsey, a statuesque black man in his early sixties, was waiting in a rear booth at The Watering Hole when Fallon arrived.

"Look, Fallon," Jack said before Fallon could slide into the booth. "I shouldn't even be here. You're poison."

"I got that impression," Fallon said.

"I almost didn't come." Jack had drunk quite a bit and some of his words were beginning to slur. "But I wasn't thinking this morning when you called."

Jack took another quick gulp of his whiskey. He was drinking a cheap bar brand. "Stern wants you dead. The Commission's hot on his ass and he wants your mouth shut."

"My mouth has been sealed since the accident. Why'd he wait so long?"

Jack waved a boney hand at Fallon's chest. "You didn't get that limp in no accident," he said. "Those two Argentine jockeys Stern brought up last summer were supposed to kill you on the track. Your girth didn't break when you went into the first turn, it was cut."

Fallon stared at the other man. Jack Gurnsey had been his friend for a long time, had taught him to ride, and had put him in his first race. Jack owned a lot of winners and had a lot of friends, but he hadn't gotten as far as he had by antagonizing Gavin Stern.

"You waited this long to tell me?"

"And if you'd stayed the hell away I never would have," Jack said. He punctuated his sentence with another gulp of booze. "You'd gotten too cocky. You wanted too big a slice. Other jockeys were easier to buy and less likely to mouth off. You brought it on yourself."

"All I got was this limp."

"Stern was happy with that," Jack said. "It got you off the track. But you kept seeing Erin White. Then somebody squealed to the Commission and Stern thinks it was you. You got reason. You got a mouth. That's all it takes."

Jack finished his whiskey and slid from the booth. Fallon followed his former employer to the gravel parking lot where their cars sat beside each other. Fallon reached through his open car window and pulled out Stern's gift bottle of Jack Daniel's. He'd promised himself that he wouldn't drink anymore, but now his nerves demanded a quick pull. He twisted open the cap and took it. Then he handed the bottle over to Jack.

Jack took a long pull. "You're on your own now, Fallon. I've told you everything I know and I can't help you no more. From now on just stay the hell away from me."

He tried to pass the bottle back.

"Keep it, Jackie," Fallon said. "You need it more than I do."

SATURDAY

Fallon woke in the middle of the night with a cramp in his stomach and spent two painful hours huddled over the toilet bowl while he heaved his guts out. At first he blamed the nightmares — another slow motion replay of horses trampling over him — and the Oriental dinner, but when Erin forced her way into the apartment that morning, he discovered the truth.

"Jack Gurnsey is dead," she told him as they sat on his overstuffed couch. "Someone poisoned him last night."

Fallon considered the bottle of Jack Daniel's and Stern's broad grin when it was delivered to his table and put the pieces together. A slow-acting poison was difficult to trace back to the source, and Stern had expected him to finish the bottle before he left the Saddle Lounge that night. If he'd gotten the bottle a week earlier, he probably would have. Fallon kept his conclusions to himself.

"What's going on?" Erin demanded. She had lost control of her voice and it crept into the higher pitches. "My own brother won't hardly talk to me and Jack's dead and that little shit Del won't run our horses the way I tell him to."

Fallon took her in his arms and pressed her face against his shoulder, his powder-blue robe absorbing her salty tears. When she seemed to have regained control of herself, Fallon lifted her face with a finger under her chin and lightly kissed her. Then he explained his sudden decision to return to the track and filled her in on the subsequent events: Del's reaction to him, the Jack Daniel's bottle and Stern's grin, his night over the toilet bowl. She put the pieces together

herself.

"I heard about the investigation," Erin said cautiously.

"Nobody's going to talk," Fallon responded. "They can investigate all they want, there's nobody going to give his life so Stern can spend a few years in the pen."

"Why not?"

Fallon studied Erin for a moment before he answered. "That bullet was sent as a warning to keep my mouth shut. Stern doesn't know what I've said or who I've said it to. I'm sure dozens of others were delivered the same way. The next time Stern sends me a bullet, it'll come from the barrel of a gun."

Fallon stood and paced. Then he said, "Let me get dressed. We're going to the track."

AN HOUR LATER THEY PARKED ERIN'S CHEVY AT A BURGER-barn. When Fallon climbed out of the car, Erin carefully pulled a service revolver from her purse and tucked it into her waistband at the small of her back. Then she climbed out of the car and they walked through a small patch of woods to the back of the Eastside Downs stables. They found an empty stall and hid inside. They could hear grooms and trainers crossing in front of the open stall door, and horses whinneying in nearby stalls. Fallon was listening for errant conversation about the investigation, hoping to catch a line on what had been happening. What he heard wasn't what he'd been expecting.

"Mr. Stern?" Fallon didn't recognize the voice, but it was deep and had a rough edge. "We've got White up at the house."

"Is he ready to talk?"

"He says he doesn't know anything. Grant worked him over a bit but he still won't tell us anything. He's pretty tough."

"I'll be up in a few minutes," Stern said. "Tell the boys to pick up his sister and that cripple — that's where he's been getting all his information."

Erin started to speak and Fallon quickly clamped a hand over her mouth. When he was sure that the two men had left, Fallon released his grip on her face.

"What now?" she asked.

"I don't know. But if they want us, the best place to be is the last place they'd expect to find us," Fallon said. "We're going up to the

house."

STERN'S MANSION SAT AT THE TOP OF THE MISSISSIPPI BLUFF overlooking the track. Erin and Fallon climbed the hill under cover of the early summer foliage. They found an open basement window at the rear of the mansion and dropped silently through it. They followed the stairs to the main floor, then went down the hall to Stern's office at the front of the house, just off the foyer. They could hear Stern's voice through the crack of the open doorway.

"I don't know anything about it," Bob White said. "I've told you that."

Stern replied, harshly. "I've got a friend on the Commission. He says the information comes out of your stable. The agent's name is White."

Bob protested and they heard the solid sound of a fist striking a jaw. White mumbled something from floor level.

"Let's try this again," Stern said.

White mumbled.

"The game's over, White. You're dog meat whether you talk or not."

"But I told you — " His answer was punctuated by a grunt.

Erin pulled the service revolver from the small of her back and motioned to Fallon. He hadn't seen her take the revolver from her purse at the Burgerbarn, but he followed her when she kicked open the office doors.

"Police," Erin shouted. "You're under arrest, chauvinist pigs."

Stern stood behind a massive oak desk. Bob White, bruised and bloody, stood opposite him, with two over-sized goons to either side. Del Smith sat in a wooden-backed chair nearby.

They responded with stunned silence. Then White yelled, "You used me," and dove at his sister.

The gun wavered as Bob White crossed in front of its barrel. Fallon dove at the larger man and knocked him off his feet before he could get caught in the cross-fire.

Del Smith pulled a .45 from under his summer jacket and brought it up to fire. Before he could squeeze the trigger, Erin blew a hole in his forearm.

In the moment Del had distracted her, Stern ducked through a side

door and one of the hoods dove through an open window.

Fallon untangled himself from Erin's brother, snatched up Del's .45 and ran out the door after Stern. By the time he reached the front door, Stern's blue Lincoln was spitting gravel behind it on its way down the long drive.

Fallon raced across the carefully sculptured lawn diagonally, his limp lost in his haste. He jumped a low brick wall at the end of the lawn, rolled into a drainage ditch, pulled himself upright, brought the .45 up at arm's length and squeezed off three quick shots.

The Lincoln swung erratically across the road and landed nose down in the drainage ditch on the other side. Fallon stood with the gun aimed toward the car, waiting for Stern to crawl out.

A blue and white squad car squealed to a halt behind him. Two uniformed officers dove from it and trained their weapons on him. Fallon slowly dropped the .45 to the roadway and waited for Erin.

SUNDAY

Erin sat across the table from Fallon. Shanghai's had seemed the best place to go the following night after Erin had straightened everything out and filed her arrest report.

"You used your brother," Fallon said.

"I told him not to get involved, but I couldn't tell him why," Erin said. "Still, he's damn good with horses."

"You used me, too, but you never gave me a choice."

"I had to . . . at first. I didn't need you after the accident."

Fallon thought about it for a moment. "But you kept seeing me because you wanted to."

"I still want to," she said.

They ate in silence for a while, then she said, "The track's going to be a lot safer place when you go back."

"What makes you think I'm going back?"

"You miss the horses and the excitement," Erin said. "You'll go back."

"Maybe I will," Fallon said, cautiously.

"My brother's going to need a partner with his stable. The state's selling him the horses," Erin said. "I've already told him you'd take the job." ●

I didn't like any of it. But a kidnapper cheap enough to ask only twenty thousand probably wouldn't risk a murder rap by killing the messenger boy. At least, that's what I hoped. I was the messenger boy!

A Simple Case of Kidnapping

by RICHARD A. MOORE

THE DODGERS AND THE BRAVES WERE PLAYING THE RUBBER game of the series with the division lead at stake. I was in the middle of the sixth inning and the third beer when the phone rang. Murphy was up with runners on the corners in the scoreless game. I waited out six rings while Murphy took the first two pitches for balls before I gave up and headed for the kitchen phone.

"Glad I caught you at home, Ed. All the other boys must be at the game." It was the boss. I could see it coming. "We've got a job we've got to get on right away."

I let the silence lengthen. On the other end of the line, I could hear

the game on his television set.

"This is what I get for being too cheap to buy a ticket."

He ignored that. "You need to drive up to Lake Lanier, 96 Lakeview Drive. Mrs. Jane Lavelle is the client."

I could hear the baseball announcers shouting from both our television sets. Something was happening. "I'll get started in an hour. Tell Mrs. Lavelle I'll be there in two."

"You'll get started right now," he snapped. "I promised her a man there in an hour."

There was nothing to do but agree. He gave me no facts about the case. Mrs. Lavelle would fill me in when I got to her place on the lake.

When I got back to the television it was in the middle of a commercial. Must have been a double play. I snapped it off, grabbed a jacket to protect against the cool night air, and headed for my car.

I had figured when I left the police force two years ago that I would no longer have to fear the telephone. But working for Southern Detectives Inc. had proved little better in that respect.

I TUNED THE GAME IN ON THE CAR RADIO. THE BRAVES TOOK the lead by the time I hit the Gainesville by-pass and won the game when I crossed Six Mile Bridge. A real thriller. I turned off the radio and began to look for my turn-off.

I found the house easily enough. It was one of the older houses on the lake. Two stories and at least four bedrooms, it would bring well into the six figures on today's market. Trust the boss. He can smell money better than I can spend it.

The door was open before I could lift a finger to punch the doorbell. The woman who stared out at me was in her late forties and had a matronly fifteen pounds over her best weight. Her round face showed signs of nervous strain.

"I'm Ed Cleveland from Southern Detectives."

Her eyes were tired. They had seen trouble tonight and I was now part of that trouble. "Yes, come inside." She stepped away from the door. "I'm Jane Lavelle."

Inside the door was a kitchen ready for a white glove inspection. No pot, glass, or dish cluttered the sink or ample counter space. Whatever was bothering her, it hadn't kept her from the supper dishes.

"Can I get you a cup of coffee?"

"Not right now. Thank you," I said.

That ended the amenities. She took a deep breath. "My son has

been kidnapped."

"You should call the police," I said bluntly. "They should have been called from the beginning."

"They said they would kill him."

"They always say that. Percentages say to call the police."

Her small mouth hardened. She wasn't used to having her judgment questioned. "Thank you for the advice. But I am going to follow their instructions exactly. My son is the only thing I have left."

"They didn't tell you to call a private detective. If they are watching the house, they'll assume I'm a cop."

"As a matter of fact, they did tell me to call a private detective," she said. "You're to take the money to them."

That raised my eyebrows. "Why wouldn't they want you or your husband to make the drop?"

"I really couldn't say. My husband died five years ago. They may not trust a woman to do it. In any case, I called the night number in the yellow pages and told the man I would pay triple the usual rates if he could get a man up here quickly."

That explained why the boss had not briefed me. At triple rates, he wouldn't even bother to ask questions.

"When did your son disappear?"

"I haven't seen him since this morning. It was just after lunch when I received a call telling me that my son had been kidnapped and I would need twenty thousand dollars to get him back." She pointed to a brown paper wrapped package on the kitchen table. "I got the money from the bank. Another call tonight explained how to deliver it."

"Where and when am I to take it to them?"

"Tonight at midnight. You're to drive to the state park. It's only about a mile. You're to drop the money down the chimney of the middle barbecue pit. Then you're to return here. My son should be released immediately."

I didn't like any of it. But a kidnapper cheap enough to ask only twenty thousand probably wouldn't risk a murder rap by killing the messenger boy.

"I still say you should call the police."

She shook her head. "The sheriff here isn't equipped to handle something like this. I can afford the twenty thousand dollars. I just want my son back."

Kidnapping was a federal crime and she could have had the best the FBI had to offer. But a glance at my watch showed it was past

eleven. There was no time for them to get here now.

"All right. I'll do it."

WE WAITED OUT THE MINUTES UNTIL MIDNIGHT. SHE TOLD me her son was fourteen years old and was in the ninth grade. They had sold their home in the city and moved to the lake house just the year before. She thought the city wasn't a good place to raise a child.

"The schools there are full of drugs," she said.

"And the woods here are full of kidnappers."

I shouldn't have said it but my nerves got the better of me. It was six minutes to midnight.

"Okay. Give me the money." She handed me the package. "I should be back within fifteen minutes. If I'm not, call the police. It will mean something has gone wrong. All bets will be off then. You can get the FBI up here and hopefully they will find me with a knot on my head but still breathing."

I took the package and climbed into my car. There was no difficulty in finding the park. It was small and unmanned. It wasn't much. Just a place to picnic.

I left the car and walked over to the middle barbeque pit. I stood on the grill and looked down into the well-sooted chimney. Without a flashlight, there wasn't anything to see but more darkness. I dropped the package and tried not to break into a run as I returned to my car.

The whole thing was over within ten minutes. Again, she met me at the doorway. "It's done. Nothing to do now but drink coffee and wait. If we don't hear from them by morning, I'm calling the police myself."

WE SETTLED IN FOR A LONG EVENING. I WAS ON MY SECOND cup of coffee about an hour later when there was a rattle at the door. She raced me to it not even hearing my whispered cautions.

It was the boy. From what I could glimpse before he disappeared into his mother's arms, he had not been harmed. I walked back into the kitchen and poured him a cup of coffee. When his mother finally turned loose of him, I gave him the coffee.

He sat on the edge of a couch next to his mother and held the cup with both hands as he sipped it. He hadn't gotten his man's growth in height yet and was more boyish than I had expected. He looked exhausted and picked nervously at his dirty shirt. Mrs. Lavelle awkwardly tried to hug him again but that just seemed to make him

uncomfortable. Affection isn't an easy thing to accept when you are fourteen years old, and I figured they didn't have much practice at it.

"I'm okay, ma. Really."

I sat down in the chair opposite them. "Why don't you tell us what happened."

"It was two men. I was playing on the shore when they came up in a cabin cruiser. They had me before I knew what was happening. They kept me tied up on the boat until just after midnight. One of them went ashore and got the money and they turned me loose."

His mother jumped to her feet. The maternal love in her eyes had disappeared. The toughness I had noticed during my argument with her had returned.

"Now I'm going to call the police," she said.

Her son started a protest but I cut him off. "No you're not."

Both of them looked at me with surprise.

"He may be too old to spank but he's too young for the police."

She sat back down. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"There were no men in a boat. There was never anyone but your own son. He cooked up the whole deal. Probably, the toughest part was disguising his voice on the telephone. Maybe he wants to run away back to the city. Maybe the drugs you tried to leave in the city cost more out here. I don't know."

The boy's face got angry. "That's a lie!"

"First of all, no professional would ask for just twenty thousand. So maybe it's a bunch of amateurs, I thought. But asking private detectives in on a case made no sense at all," I said.

The boy turned to his mother. "Don't believe him. You can't believe him."

I reached over and raised his arm. "You didn't get that black soot on your shirt from any boat. That was when you reached in for the money? Reaching in, you leaned on the dirty chimney." I turned to the money. "Goodbye, Mrs. Lavelle. We'll send you the bill."

I started to walk to the door. There was a stony silence from the couch. I looked back and saw that the boy couldn't meet his mother's angry look. "Don't be too hard on him. He obviously does care for you."

She transferred the look to me. "What makes you say that?"

"Even when it was all play-acting, he couldn't send his mother out in the night on a ransom drop."

Little Heinz was loose, and the cops were waiting for Laughing Boy to finger him so they could close in. The question was: could he do it under the watchful eyes of the mob, and how, and would they recognize it if he did?

The Block

by ISAK ROMUN

BROSNAN SAT, LIKE AN IRRITATED SLAB OF GRANITE, AND looked with displeasure at the people in the taproom.

"The friends of Big Heinz," he snarled.

"When your boy gets here," I pointed out, "you'll have at least one friend in the place."

"If he shows, Monahan. If he does, he better produce."

"He" was a police snitch and what he had to produce were the whereabouts of Heinz Strenzelmann, Jr. (aka Little Heinz), heir to Big Heinz Strenzelmann's criminal holdings. These included various enterprises linked to drugs, prostitution, loan sharking, the numbers, bet-rigging — you name it, Big Heinz had a finger, probably several fingers, in it. There were some prerequisites that had to be met before Big Heinz showed an interest. A scheme had to be enormously profitable, and thus probably illegal, and, as a fringe benefit, a bur in the hide of Lieutenant Brosnan, who for the best part of a decade had been trying to nail Big Heinz.

"Sure your snitch can produce?" I asked.

"We know Little Heinz is here in The Block. *Where* in The Block, I don't have the faintest. Why don't you let me knock down a few doors?"

The question was directed at the third man at our table. This was Judge Armand Chase, one of that new breed of magistrates who has a lot of trouble sorting out the good guys from the bad. It was Chase who'd give Brosnan the green light providing the police lieutenant could convince him to turn it on.

Chase put down his drink and, in an annoying habit he had, began ticking off the reasons he couldn't accommodate Brosnan.

"One," Chase said holding up an index finger, "we just don't go around knocking down doors. Not these days." Another finger. "Two, I can't do anything for you until you give me something more subst-

tial, some definite place you know, or have good reason to suspect, Little Heinz is holed up." A third finger. "And three, you're not even sure Little Heinz is here in The Block."

"Oh, gee whiz," Brosnan said, "I was hoping you'd go up to five this time."

"I'm warning you."

Brosnan looked around the taproom and said, "What're you going to do, hold me in contempt of gin mill?"

"Wherever a judge sits, that's his court."

"Then be a judge. I've laid out what I know for you. I *know* he's here in The Block! Give me a go-ahead."

Chase smiled and shook his head.

The Block was a sprawling piece of real estate owned lock, stock, and paid-up mortgages by Big Heinz. Besides a high-rise apartment building, it had two candy stores, a supermarket, a funeral parlor, a small department store, a drug store, a hardware store, and the bar and grill in which we were sitting. All were owned or controlled by Big Heinz and run by favored members of his "family."

WHY BROSNAN WAS LOOKING FOR LITTLE HEINZ IN THE
Block was really another chapter in the cop's efforts to stick Big Heinz. About a year ago, Brosnan decided to cease his frontal attack on the father and have a go at the son. Little Heinz possessed none of his father's smarts or talent for staying on the visiting side of the bars in the Paulsburg jail. So, Brosnan rigged a scene in which Little Heinz was caught transacting a drug deal with a hippie cop.

Result: into the city pokey for Little Heinz while awaiting arraignment on drug trafficking charges. Which might have been a tactical error. The Jail Division came under a different authority then the, by and large, straight-arrow Paulsburg police. The jail officials had as much resistance to bribes as the creaking, nineteenth century lockup had to force. So, no surprise, Little Heinz escaped, and was now out of sight.

It wasn't hard to figure where he was, provided you thought in gross, rather than fine terms. There was nowhere else to go but The Block, the seat of Strenzelmann power. Brosnan's snitch had told the police lieutenant that somewhere in that pile of concrete and brick Little Heinz was hiding out, at least until he could be smuggled out of the state or the country. Just where Little Heinz was hiding, the snitch didn't know, but would get word to Brosnan when he did. If Brosnan

would come to The Block's bar and grill, the snitch would attempt to slip the lieutenant a note or get word to him.

Brosnan quickly sealed off The Block. Little Heinz couldn't squeeze out — but Brosnan couldn't bust in, either. Not without good reason, as Chase took every occasion to point out.

"Let's not waste any more of my time, Brosnan," the judge was saying when Brosnan looked down quickly and whispered, "He's here. Coming in with two others. He's got on a green hat. Laughing Boy."

"Laughing Boy?"

"We don't use real names, Monahan. And when you write your story for that paper of yours, don't use Laughing Boy, either."

"How is he going to get a message to you?" Chase wondered. "In here, of all places, and with those two with him."

"He said he couldn't get off The Block tonight. We had to meet here. Maybe they suspect something. He was always alone before. It may be off."

"Did you say off?" The judge beamed. "Then I'll be off."

He was about to get up, when I put a firm hand on his sleeve. "Wait," I said. "Maybe he'll come through somehow or other." I didn't want to walk away from there without something to write. Not with Abe Slaughter, my photographer, waiting outside in my car. Particularly since I had talked him into giving up his night off to come along with me.

Brosnan picked up on what I said. "It's worth waiting a little longer, isn't it, Judge?"

"I don't think so, lieutenant, I've better things to do."

"I'd like to do a piece on you, Judge," I said unexpectedly.

"What kind of piece?"

"That depends on what happens here tonight."

Chase settled back into his chair. "I suppose I could hang around a little longer." He fingered his empty glass. "If someone's buying."

Brosnan shot me a grateful look, then signaled the waiter for another round: a beer for me, a ginger ale for Brosnan, Jim Beam neat for Chase. The waiter placed our refilled glasses on the coasters he had taken them off moments before.

Except for Chase, we didn't pay much attention to our drinks. Brosnan and I were watching every move Laughing Boy made.

IT WAS EASY TO SEE WHY BROSNAN CALLED HIM LAUGHING Boy. He was a regular cutup, joking, slapping the other two on their

backs, calling the table's order over to the bartender, two beers from the local brewery for his friends and an imported brand for him. His two companions affected enjoyment; they were smiling stiffly as if they had combs stuck sideways in their mouths.

The beers came. The waiter casually dropped Paulsburg Brewery coasters on the table then set the drinks down on them. The only incident of interest occurred when Laughing Boy insisted on a coaster to match the brand he'd ordered. The waiter shrugged, went back to the bar, said something to the bartender. The bartender rummaged about in a box and pretty soon his hand came out holding a coaster, larger and thicker than the domestic ones, and handed it to the waiter. The waiter gave it to Laughing Boy who seemed satisfied with it.

After awhile, the three of them finished their drinks, Laughing Boy last. He wanted another, but the other two shook their heads and he didn't insist. They got up and walked toward the door. Once there, I thought I saw Laughing Boy glance briefly at Brosnan without the humor he had been so lavish with before. Then he put on his green hat and exited with the others.

"That's it!" Brosnan said. "If he was trying to get a message to me, he failed. Or I didn't receive it. Or he just came in because he likes German beer. Let's go."

"No!" I said suddenly. Then, feeling as if I were putting all my coins on a long shot, I told Brosnan, "The funeral home. Shake it down, go over every bit of it. I'll explain later."

Brosnan eyed me steadily. "Monahan, if you're out to get a story at any cost — "

"You're losing time." I gestured toward Chase. "Have him give you the search warrant."

Brosnan looked at me closely, then turned to Chase. "Give it to me, Judge."

"Don't be ridiculous, Brosnan."

"Look, I'll go in there on probable cause with or without your piece of paper. If I nab him how'll it look for the court, refusing to cooperate with the police in the recapture of an escaped felon?"

Chase took a document out of an inside coat pocket. He smoothed it out on the table, produced a pen, and wrote in the name of the funeral parlor. He signed it and handed it to the policeman.

"You better be right," the judge said, then got up and left.

"And so had you, Monahan," Brosnan whispered before he rushed out of the place.

I was right behind him, waving wildly to Abe Slaughter to get his stuff together and follow me.

NEXT DAY, WHEN BROSNAN VISITED ME, HE SAID, "I WON'T even think about what would've happened if you had been wrong. I got my man, you got your story, and even Chase is bragging about his cooperativeness."

Brosnan was smiling, a rarity for him. "Today Little Heinz; tomorrow, who knows, maybe Daddy. How'd you figure it?"

I asked, "What do you associate with funeral parlors?"

"Stiffs, caskets, ripped-off widows. What else?"

"Let's try again. You had The Block sewed up tight. Nothing could get out without you taking a look-see. Nothing, that is, except — " I paused.

His face brightened. "Nothing except — a funeral procession. Even I would think twice before opening a coffin."

"He wasn't in a coffin, though, was he?"

"No. He was in that room where they store the stands for the coffins. Boy, did you see the look on his face when we grabbed him?"

"I was there, remember? And Abe got the shot that's probably going to get him another press association award."

"Yeah, we all made out like thieves. Oops, Freudian slip. Hey, I have to get going."

Brosnan stood up. He looked around the city room with a sour look which might have been convincing if I hadn't known it was faked.

"Monahan, any time you want to hang up this racket, come see me. You'd look great in blue. Laughing Boy didn't come across, but you did. The grapevine tells us he's long gone, by the way. Slipped away from his buddies and just kept moving." He waved his hand, said "Thanks!" and walked out.

After Brosnan left, I thought about Laughing Boy and how he *did* come across. But Brosnan would never believe *that* story. And he wouldn't take kindly that I put his career on the line based on my reading of a message I *thought* Laughing Boy was trying to pass. That's why I made up the procession story.

If I ever see Laughing Boy again, though, I'll buy him all the German beer he can drink and make sure he has a clean, fresh German coaster for each round. A coaster prominently displaying the German word for beer. You know, it's spelled B-I-E-R.



The free lovers and women's libbers and all the other asinine organizations had changed things so an indecent girl couldn't make a decent living any more. It was definitely time for a change!

In Time For Murder

by MIKE TAYLOR

GLORY TWIRLED HER SWIZZLE STICK IN THE NOW-TEPID highball and scooted her tight-skirted rear-end around on the stool. Business was rotten! As usual.

Two lousy tricks was all she'd managed to turn since Tuesday. Now it was only an hour from Friday closing time and the place looked more like a morgue than a cocktail lounge. Weekends were prime time for the johns; if they didn't show now, well, they just weren't coming.

There were three loners down at the other end of the bar but for all they cared she might as well be chopped liver. They were having a

heated discussion over the Cowboys-Eagles game this Sunday. Glory tossed her platinum hair and peered down at her canyon-deep cleavage. She had all the signs out. They just weren't buying.

It wasn't just this day or this week, she decided, it was society as a whole. Hell, society was a hole! The free lovers and women's libbers and all the other asinine organizations had turned things so upside down that a girl couldn't make a decent living anymore. Why pay for it when there's so many giving it away free?

Glory stretched languidly and her seams creaked. Maybe a few pounds off the old frame would help. Lord knew she didn't eat that much. But each year it got a little tougher to keep all the bulges in the right places. Face it, kid, you're no chicken anymore. You know what they say happens to old hookers: the same thing as old horses.

She wished she could turn back the clock. Not just to her own juicy years, but 'way back, back to before all this liberal bullshit started. Back to when men had hangups and wives were frigid or pregnant and a working girl had her place in the scheme of things. Dream, dream. Reality was, the rent was due Monday, and she wasn't making a dime.

"Nother round?" Carl the bartender asked in a sandpaper voice. He wouldn't let her nurse one drink all night; she had to put down a few or he'd throw her ass out on the street.

"Why not?" Glory sighed. "Looks like that'll be the highlight of the evening."

THE JOHN SHE FINALLY LATCHED ONTO, JUST BEFORE THE doors shut, was a skinny, wimp-faced dude who acted like he hadn't had any since this time last year. He took her to his place and, when the dirty deed was over, she lay there on his pullout couch and watched him hunt for his glasses. At least he hadn't asked for anything kinky.

"What in God's name is that thing, honey?" She waved a scarlet-nailed hand at the weird contraption in the corner.

It looked like a phone booth had collided with a home satellite station. There was a big dish, coils and vanes everywhere, a three foot wide half-tube of reflectorized metal, all enclosed in a glass and steel case about the size of a coffin on end.

The john — "Call me Bill" — actually blushed. "You wouldn't believe it."

"Aw, c'mon. You look like a smart guy. What is it — one of those new home-tanning units, I bet?"

"No. It's — it's a time machine."

"For crying out loud, Bill! Who do I look like — Rod Serling?"

"It is." He hung his head. "That's why it's still sitting here — nobody in the goddam world believes me. The invention of a lifetime, and they all think I'm cracked."

"Poor baby." Glory slipped her arm around his thin shoulders. "They don't believe me when I say I'm working my way through college either. You mean to tell me this thing travels through time?"

"Yes! It does! It works!"

"Okay, okay. Take it easy. Can it go back to last month? Last year?"

"The last year, the last century. Anytime! Anywhere! It has latitude and longitude coordinates for temporal displacement too."

"Huh?"

"It can take you anyplace in the world, anytime in history."

"How about the future?"

"No-o-o. I haven't quite figured that out yet. Just the past."

Glory realized she was shivering. "Really? I mean, you've tried it out. Tested it?"

"Only with inanimate objects. And insects and small animals. I haven't found any person willing to risk it."

"So how do you know it works?"

"Well . . . it always comes back empty. Where else could the stuff disappear to? Unfortunately, it's a one-way trip."

"Oh." Her mind was racing. "Could it — uh — if I was willing — could you send me back there? Somewhere?"

His eyes were alight. With this kid it was better than sex. "Sure. Sure I could. Where would you want to go?"

Glory thought. This was the weirdest thing she'd run into since the old guy who liked whips and leather. But if it were possible! What she had been thinking, earlier tonight. To go back, back to a better time, where her particular trade was still appreciated. But when? Where?

She scoured her mind. Not the sixties, those screwball times. Not the fifties, too conservative. Not the forties, all kinds of chicks around then with the war on. Not the depression-ridden thirties, nobody could afford it in those days. Hell with it, skip the whole worthless century. How about the late 1800's? Glory Marks in the 19th century! It sounded like a TV show.

Where? It had to be someplace they spoke English. Her knowledge of foreign languages was limited to monetary discussions. Inspiration struck. In junior high she had been wacko over those old Sherlock Holmes movies. Foggy London. The solid, secure Victorian days.

Wouldn't her talents be a gold mine there? Glory giggled. Elementary, my dear Watson.

"London," she whispered, running her hand over his bony chest. "Sometime around 1890. Can you do that?"

HE COULD. AND DID. THE TRANSITION WAS SWIFT, A LITTLE nauseating, otherwise okay. One minute she was in Bill's apartment, the next she was standing in a dingy street, the fog swirling thickly around her. A gas lamp threw a yellow nimbus over moisture-slick cobblestones.

Glory swallowed her heart, suddenly a little nervous. She was there! Here! London, before the turn of the century. Cripes!

A light beckoned her. She found herself on a rough brick sidewalk, standing in front of — a pub! Well, now. She was in her element already. Maybe her clothes weren't exactly in fashion, but they'd do for now. This part of town looked a little grubby anyway. What's to worry? They didn't call it the oldest profession for nothing. Glory squared her shoulders, thrust out her chest, and marched inside.

It was warm, crowded. Appreciative eyes watched as she made her way along the bar, sizing up the johns. Most of them were a hard-looking lot, dirty and obviously poor. But then, about two-thirds of the way down the row, she spotted a tall, well-dressed, darkly handsome fellow. Cape, top hat, and cane. Glory made for him like a pilot fish after a shark.

"Hello, my pretty," he said, taking her hand.

"Charmed, I'm sure," she said, her voice husky, trying to remember how they acted in those old movies. It was no sweat. The ritual small talk hadn't changed much in ninety years. Glory held her own well. A pint of warm ale bolstered her courage. Before long an agreement had been reached and they were ready to leave. Glory relaxed. How about that? Her first trick in the nineteenth century.

The fog had lifted a bit as they left the pub. Strolling along the rough sidewalk, Glory noticed the crude wooden sign on a small establishment across the street: Whitechapel Inn.

Something made a small, icy click in the back of her mind.

"What's your name, honey?" she asked as he took her arm.

"My real name isn't important," he replied softly, but his grip was hard and cold as steel as he steered her into a nearby alley. "You can call me Jack . . ." ●

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Book Reviews



Stiff Competition

by JOHN BALL

Patricia Moyes is a lady whose credentials as a crime writer are firmly established. In her newest novel, *A Six Letter Word For Death*, she takes us to the Isle of Wight where Chief Superintendent Henry Tibbett of the Yard (where else!) has agreed to address a small group of authors, all of whom write their crime stories under carefully concealed pen names. To taunt him, they send him a difficult crossword puzzle filled with clues to solve. Tibbett deduces the owners of various pen names, but then someone is done in and our great detective is not even called to testify at the inquest. The plot line is ingenious, as we have learned to expect from Miss Moyes, and the unraveling is smooth, although there is very little in the way of action to spice up the whole. Largely a classic puzzle in the British tradition. (Holt Rinehart, \$13.50)

☆ ☆ ☆

An interesting departure, and a most enjoyable one, is James Gollin's new book all about crime and music called *Eliza's Galiardo*. Behind this unlikely title he has hidden an entertaining story about a medieval manuscript that just might contain some music composed by Elizabeth the Queen — the first one, that is. The enjoyment of this book will be considerably enhanced if the reader has a true interest in music, particularly old music. The finale of this one is not a crime chase through smoking streets, but rather a tension-filled concert by the five Antiqua Players that is as tightly gripping as could be asked. Unless you are hopelessly hooked on rock 'n roll, you'll find this a delightful tale. (St. Martin's, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

James Burch has used the fearsome reputation of Russia's most notorious prison to create a novel that holds many of the elements of

Gorky Park, and that is saying plenty. His title is *Lubyanka* which pretty much tells it all. A physicist who holds a secret of great value is believed to be a prisoner being held there. The CIA sends Edward Rhone, a brilliant escape artist, to try and get him out. Rhone succeeds in getting himself put into the Lubyanka and in locating his target. A lot happens before the actual escape is attempted. There is an interlude in Siberia which doesn't add much to the story, but when Rhone gets back where he was, in a supposedly escape-proof cell, the action picks up splendidly. Since it is unlikely that the author has ever trod the ground of his story, his exercise of imagination has to be admired; he conjures up the fearsome prison until its cold stone walls and bars become all too real. (Atheneum, \$13.95)

★ ★ ★

We are back in Scotland Yard again in Dorothy Simpson's new book, *Puppet For a Corpse*, about Detective Inspector Luke Thanet. This time we are confronted with the obvious suicide of a man who had everything to live for and no motive whatever for removing himself from the scene. A happy marriage, a baby on the way, and a fine expensive vacation coming up in three weeks time all mitigate against suicide, but there is the corpse, note and all. The solution is neat, very well plotted, and deftly done, but the book is quite static because the people in it do little but visit each other and talk, over and over again. We do not hold that every good book must be built on action, but a little in this case would have gone a long way to liven things up a bit. (Scribners, \$11.95)

★ ★ ★

If black comedy is your dish, then you can feast on Michael Butterworth's *The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo*. Our hero, Ernest Rowbotham, will inherit a very handsome sum IF he complies with the requirements of his late Uncle Luigi's will. Uncle was a Chicago Mafia boss who dictates that Ernest must take him to many places in Europe he always wanted to visit, in grand style. Uncle Luigi being deceased, his preserved remains have to be trundled in a wheel chair to all the elegant occasions he specified in a way that his condition is not likely to be noticed. Understandably he ignores the many *haut cuisine* items that are placed before him and he is not noted as a conversationalist. Then new complications appear. This is humor at its blackest; if you can survive it, it's lots of fun. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

★ ★ ★

A mixture of crime suspense and science fiction is found in Thierry J. Sagnier's *The IFO report*. An alien has possibly landed on earth and, reportedly, there is a vital film clip that could or could not show the actual event. A top reporter, a NASA scientist, a State Department official and, essentially, a very determined lady willing to do anything to get the film strip all get involved in the action which holds interest tightly as the tale unfolds. A good espionage entry from Avon at \$3.50.

☆ ☆ ☆

For the serious collector there is an excellent new volume of some of the late John Dickson Carr's radio scripts. They are collected under the title *The Dead Sleep Lightly* and you won't get much rest either if you start this one late in the day. Here again are the locked rooms, the impossible crimes, and, in two of the tales, Dr. Gideon Fell. These scripts are published here for the first time. Carr richly deserved his grand master status and every good mystery fan reads everything by him that he can get his hands on. Here's your chance for more; don't miss it. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

PAPERBACK NOTES: Tony Hillerman's excellent tale of the Navajo Indians, *The Dark Wind*, is now available from Avon at \$2.50. Whatever you do, don't miss Hillerman . . . Larry Block, who once wrote as Chip Harrison has two of his alter ego books in one volume: *Make Out With Murder* and *The Topless Tulip Caper*. They are delightful satires about a fat would-be detective who collects tropical fish and vastly admires Nero Wolfe. If you know your Rex Stout, you'll find many inside references to the master who resided on West 35th Street. Lots of fun here from The Countryman Press, Woodstock, Vermont, \$5.95 . . . Nero Wolfe himself is also reprinted this month in Rex Stout's *Homicide Trinity*, from Bantam at \$2.50 . . . Catherine Aird is a justly famous producer of delightful mysteries. Her latest reprint is *Parting Breath* from Bantam; it's \$2.25 very well spent . . . The tradition of violence started by Don Pendleton in The Executioner series now continues, under his direction, with *Able Team* and *Phoenix Force*, both offered by Gold Eagle at \$1.95 each . . . What might be called the Nightmare Division kicks off this month with *The Bad Room* by Christopher Cook Gilmore, in which a father, seeking his missing son, is trapped in a wild insane asylum by brutal guards, a demented director — and the torture room awaits. Good night, pleasant dreams. From Avon for the durable at \$2.95.

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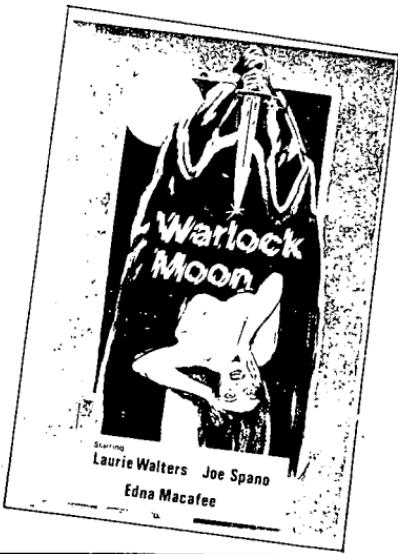


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